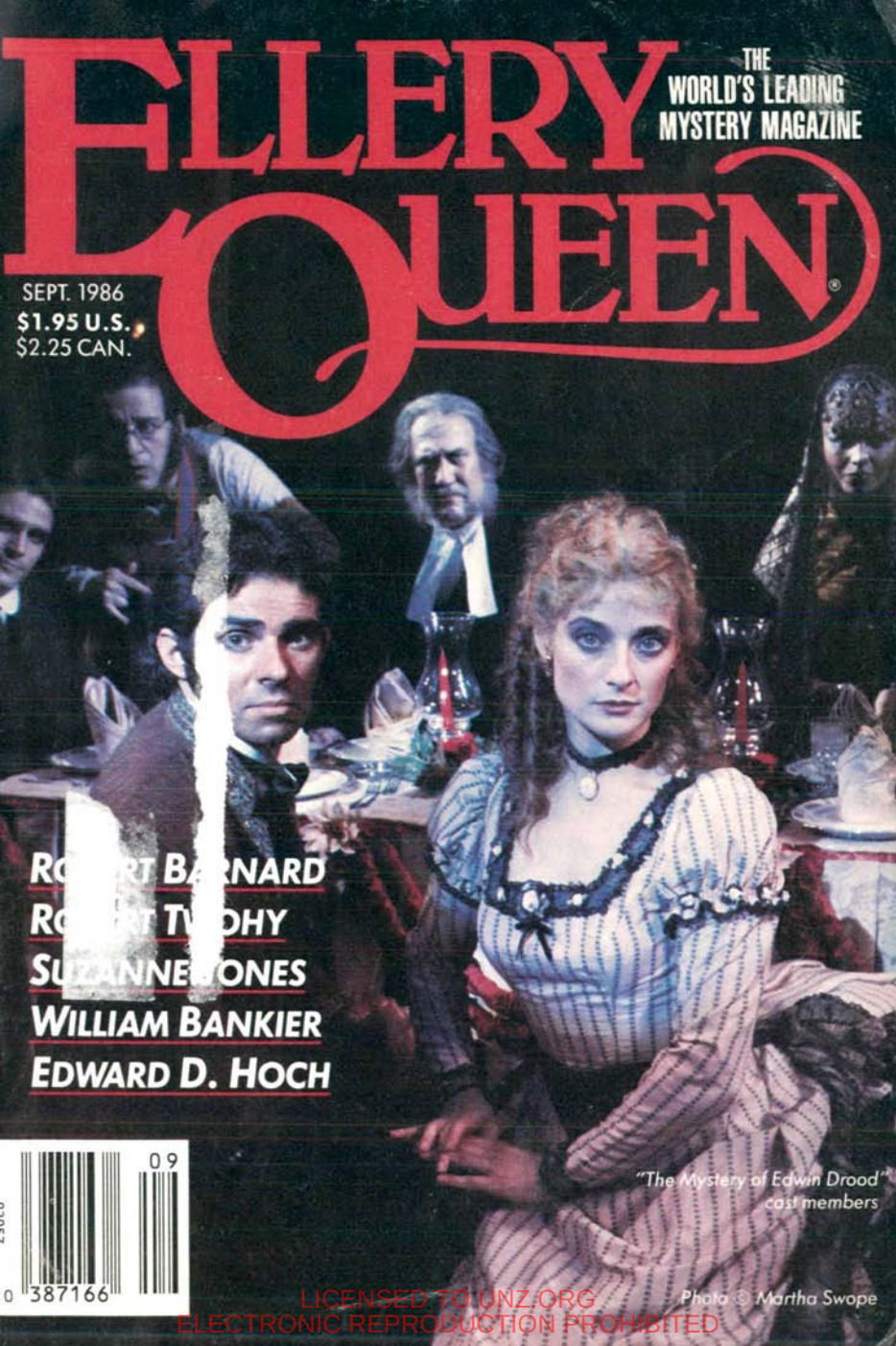
ELLERY QUEEN

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SEPT. 1986
$1.95 U.S.,
$2.25 CAN.



ROBERT BARNARD
ROBERT TWOHY
SUZANNE JONES
WILLIAM BANKIER
EDWARD D. HOCH

"The Mystery of Edwin Drood" cast members

Photo © Martha Swope

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Harlequin Intrigue™ *Wants You!*

Calling all authors

Do you think you could write a script for *Remington Steele*, *Scarecrow and Mrs. King*, or a movie like *Romancing the Stone*? Then try a ***Harlequin Intrigue***.

There's no question romantic suspense is the wave of the future. That's why ***Harlequin Intrigue*** is opening its doors to new writers—to give you an opportunity to catch a rising star. All it takes is your writing talent and our know how. Here's what you need to get started:

Take one not-so-average hero and one not-so-average heroine and throw them into a plot packed with action, danger, mystery and suspense. Add equal parts chemistry and romance, and you are on your way to creating a ***Harlequin Intrigue***.

Show us your ideas...at least the first three chapters and a detailed synopsis. (Full manuscripts 70-75,000 words.) For a limited time we will accept agented and non-agented material, so don't put off today what may be gone tomorrow. ***Harlequin Intrigue*** is the vehicle you've been waiting for. Don't let the future start without you!

*ADVANCE PLUS ROYALTIES
*INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

For further information and guidelines, contact:

Reva Kindser
Harlequin Books
300 East 42nd Street
New York, NY
10017
U.S.A.

Marmie Charndoff
Harlequin Books
225 Duncan Mill Road
Don Mills, Ontario
M3B 3K9
Canada

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN®

On the cover are cast members of "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" *(left to right)* Howard McGillin, Joe Grifasi, John Herrera, George N. Martin, Patti Cohenour, and Jana Schneider

2 **The Problem of the Sealed Bottle** / Edward D. Hoch
18 **Hardacre Hall** / Robert Barnard
28 **For a Coffin of Pine** / John F. Suter
44 **A Secret Place** / Suzanne Jones
55 **You Never Know Your Luck** / William Bankier
78 **The Night of Power** / Josh Pachter
92 **Management Decision** / John Higham
101 **The Bellman Portrait** / Robert Edward Eckels
118 **Old Bones** / Barbara Hafen
126 **The Rhyming Coppers** / Jeffry Scott
138 **Going for Destiny** / Robert Twohy

74 **The Jury Box** / Allen J. Hubin

Note: indicia on page 159

LICENSED TO UMZOMO
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Tuesday, December 5, 1933 in Northmont.

"Phil Yancy called a while back to say it got so late in the day the Boston warehouse decided they couldn't deliver the whiskey and gin and rum to him till morning. All he's got for me's a case of port and a case of sherry."

"Hell," Finnigan grumbled. "I was hopin' for some good Scotch."

"It's the same in New York City," Molly Franklin told him. "The warehouses are full, but most of them have already closed for the day. I hear only two liquor stores got their supplies, and only about one percent of the bars and restaurants with licenses. The rest will have to wait till tomorrow if they don't want to get caught serving illegal stuff . . ."

THE PROBLEM OF THE SEALED BOTTLE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"This time I promised to tell you about the night Prohibition ended in Northmont," old Dr. Sam Hawthorne told his visitor as he poured a generous glass of brandy. "Of course, it ended all over the country at the same time, but I don't expect it was quite as dramatic anywhere else as it was in Northmont."

The day was Tuesday, December 5, 1933 (Dr. Sam continued). Franklin D. Roosevelt had been in the White House since March, and thirty-three states had already ratified the constitutional

© 1986 by Edward D. Hoch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

amendment repealing Prohibition. Utah was insisting upon the honor of being the thirty-sixth and final state needed to ratify the amendment, and its state convention delayed the vote until Pennsylvania and Ohio had acted. The hour grew late, and it was 5:32 P.M. on the East Coast before the ratification finally came from Utah. Just over an hour later, President Roosevelt signed the official proclamation ending Prohibition.

Each community celebrated in its own way. In Northmont, a group of us had been invited to have our first legal drink in nearly fourteen years at Molly's Cafe, a brand-new enterprise on the site of the old coffee shop. It seemed a fitting place to offer the newly legalized spirits, because many of us had frequented the coffee shop over the years for a cup full of illegal spirits.

Molly Franklin was a jovial woman in her early forties who'd moved to Northmont a few years earlier with her husband Gus. They'd come from Boston, where Molly's father ran an electroplating business, and Gus had opened a small cigar store on Main Street near the town hall. They seemed like a happily married couple and it came as a shock to everyone when Gus Franklin hanged himself in his garage one night while Molly was away visiting her family in Boston. It took her a few months to recover from the shock, but she decided to remain in Northmont and open her own business. She used the money from Gus's insurance and the cigar store to buy the coffee shop and remodel it into a cafe. She was ready to open on the day Prohibition ended, and a steady rain did nothing to dampen her spirits.

I took my nurse April to the opening of Molly's Cafe that evening, and Molly greeted us at the door with her usual exuberance. "Come on in, Sam—you, too, April. We're just waiting for word on the radio that it's legal again." She was a tall, big-boned woman with a good figure only a little on the plump side. She'd had her short blonde hair carefully waved for the occasion and wore a fancy dress that sparkled when it caught the light.

I shed the raincoat I'd worn against the damp drizzle outside, and took April's coat. "Not a pleasant evening," I said, looking for a place to hang them.

"Cheer up—ten degrees colder and it would be snow. Here, Doc, we've got a regular checkroom for your coats. This is a high-class place." She took them from me.

I had to admit it was a big improvement over the coffee shop. The lights were dim enough to lend a little atmosphere, and large wall

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mirrors made the place appear about twice as large as it really was. A good crowd was already gathered at the bar, and I spotted Dr. Wayne from the hospital along with Mayor Cresson and his wife Susan. My friend Sheriff Lens was there, too, playing with an empty wine glass as if he couldn't wait for the long-anticipated moment to arrive.

"How are you, Sheriff?"

"Doin' fine, Doc. This is a big night."

"That it is," I agreed.

"But Molly doesn't have her stock in yet. Phil Yancy's goin' into the liquor distribution business—legally, this time—and he can't make his delivery until Roosevelt signs the proclamation."

"Well, we've waited this long. I guess we can wait a while longer."

I drifted over to the bar where Molly was chatting with John Finnigan, one of the town aldermen. Finnigan was a balding man of about fifty I'd been treating for a variety of minor ailments. "Didn't know you were a drinking man, Sam," he said as I joined them.

"This is more in the nature of a celebration. I figured you needed a doctor present in case somebody imbibes a little too much."

"Well, we got Doc Wayne, too, so we're doubly protected."

"I doubt if you'll need it," Molly Franklin told us glumly. "Phil Yancy called a while back to say it got so late in the day the Boston warehouse decided they couldn't deliver the whiskey and gin and rum to him till morning. All he's got for me's a case of port and a case of sherry."

"Hell," Finnigan grumbled. "I was hopin' for some good Scotch."

"We're not alone," Molly said, apparently on the theory that misery loves company. "It's the same in New York City. The warehouses are full, but most of them have already closed for the day. I hear only two liquor stores got their supplies, and only about one percent of the bars and restaurants with licenses. The rest will have to wait till tomorrow if they don't want to get caught serving illegal stuff."

As if on cue, the door opened to admit Phil Yancy, carrying a cardboard case on his shoulder. A cheer went up from the twenty or so people waiting at the bar. He shook the rain from himself like a big friendly dog and set the case on the bar. "Here's your port, Molly. I'll go get the sherry. It's rainin' cats and dogs now."

"What's the price of this going to be, Molly?" Mayor Cresson asked from down the bar. He was a good egg, a well off real-estate salesman when he wasn't busy mayoring. He hadn't been in office a full year yet, but everyone seemed to like him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The first drink's on the house," Molly announced, bringing a loud cheer. "After that it'll be thirty cents a glass, same as New York prices. And forty-five cents for Scotch."

Anyone but Molly might have gotten an argument about charging the same prices as New York, but everyone was in such a good mood that no one questioned it. Dr. Wayne was already pulling open the top of the box as if to assure us there really were bottles inside. Yancy returned with the sherry and set it on the bar next to the port.

Molly turned the case around to read the label and then opened it as everyone crowded around.

"Who's first?" Finnigan asked.

"I think it should be Mayor Cresson," Molly announced, and nobody argued with that. "What'll it be, Mayor? Port or sherry?"

Cresson seemed to waver between the two freshly opened cases. "Maybe a little port. No, no—make it sherry. I haven't had sherry in so long I've almost forgotten what it tastes like."

"Choose your bottle."

Now there was no hesitation. The mayor reached for the one in the upper left-hand corner of the box and withdrew it from its slot. The seal was removed and Molly ceremoniously presented Cresson with a corkscrew. He was grinning like a small boy as he removed the cork and another cheer went up. He chose one of the wine glasses from the row on the bar, held it up to the light, and then filled it with sherry from the bottle.

"To your health," he announced to the room. "And to the future of Northmont."

Alderman Finnigan picked up a glass and held it out to be filled, but then a curious thing happened. Still holding the sherry bottle in his left hand, the mayor drained the glass and made a terrible face. "It doesn't taste—"

He never finished the sentence. I saw him start to drop and dashed forward to catch him. Behind me, Susan Cresson screamed.

His breathing almost stopped, though he still clutched the sherry bottle with one hand. Some of it spilled on the floor as I lowered him and tried to get him breathing again. Then I caught the unmistakable odor of bitter almonds. I took the bottle from his grip and smelled it. There could be no doubt.

"He's been poisoned," I said. "Cyanide, I think."

"Can't you do anything?" his wife cried.

"I'm sorry, Susan. He's dead . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Later, as the body was being removed, Sheriff Lens said, "You've got to help me on this one, Doc."

"I'll supervise the autopsy if you want. And I'll see that the contents of this bottle are analyzed, though I'm pretty certain it's cyanide—probably a solution of potassium cyanide."

"You know what I mean. I need your help in solving it."

"It's been more than a year since the last time," I told him. "I'm devoting more time to my patients these days, Sheriff. I'm out of the amateur-detective business."

"This is the *mayor,* Doc. They'll have my scalp if I don't come up with a quick solution. And it's impossible! We were watching all the time and nobody touched that bottle or that glass except Cresson himself."

Molly had cleared everyone out of the place and was staring down at a spot of spilled wine near where the body had been. "Maybe he killed himself," she suggested. "Whatever happened, it sure as hell ruined my opening."

"The only thing I can suggest is that the entire case was poisoned at the vineyard or the bottling plant." I walked over and lifted out another bottle at random. "Let's see if I'm right." But when I opened the bottle with the corkscrew there was no odor of bitter almonds. "I think this one is all right, but I'll have it analyzed to be certain."

"You'd better take the whole case along, Doc," Sheriff Lens said.

"Good idea. The hospital lab has the equipment we need." I glanced at Molly. "I'm sorry about this."

"Go ahead," she said with a wave of her hand. "I suppose the sooner we know how he died the sooner I can get down to business here without this cloud hanging over the place."

In the morning I knew a little more about the death of Mayor Cresson. The bottle he'd opened had indeed contained potassium cyanide, in a large enough concentration to kill almost instantly. And none of the other eleven bottles in the case had been poisoned. They all contained sherry and nothing else. I was left with the theory that some disgruntled worker at a winery in France had poisoned a single bottle and that mere happenstance had caused the death of Mayor Edmund Cresson here in Northmont.

But I didn't believe it for a minute.

I drove over to the jail and gave my findings to a downhearted Sheriff Lens. "Alderman Finnigan has asked the state police to take over the investigation," he told me. "He says I'm not competent to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conduct it. Can you imagine that? I'm the one who caught those kids breakin' into his house last summer, and he calls me incompetent!"

"It won't do any good to get upset, Sheriff. We've got to keep calm and think about this."

His face lit up. "Does that mean you'll help me?"

"I'll help point you in the right direction, that's all I can promise. What have we got so far?"

"A poisoned sherry bottle and one dead mayor," the sheriff answered glumly, "who picked the bottle, opened it, and poured it himself."

"I know. He even picked his own glass, and there was nothing else in it. The poison was in the bottle."

"Unless someone added it in the confusion after he keeled over."

I shook my head. "He had a good grip on the bottle until I took it from him, and then the poison was already in it. That means it was in before he pulled that cork."

"A poisoned corkscrew?" Sheriff Lens asked, but even he didn't seem to regard the suggestion very seriously.

"No, there was too much poison for that. And I opened the second bottle with the same corkscrew."

"Then the bottle had to be poisoned earlier. That points the finger at the man who delivered it—Phil Yancy."

"Even if Yancy somehow poisoned it and resealed it, how did he know Mayor Cresson would choose that bottle?"

"He couldn't have. But maybe he didn't care who died, maybe he just wanted to discredit Molly's bar, or drinking in general. Maybe he's a secret Prohibitionist."

"Phil Yancy?" I laughed at the idea. "He's been selling moonshine in these parts ever since I came to Northmont."

"Maybe he made this stuff and faked the labels. Who'd know the difference after all these years of Prohibition?"

"It's real. Dr. Wayne is something of a wine expert and he confirmed it." I'd spoken with him before leaving the hospital that morning.

"Will you do me one favor, Doc? Will you question Phil Yancy about that delivery? I gotta stay here and wait for the state police."

I figured it was the least I could do for him. I'd have been fooling nobody if I denied the case intrigued me. It had been a long time since I'd helped Sheriff Lens with a murder case, and I had no patients in the hospital and nothing but routine office calls lined up.

"All right," I agreed, "I'll talk to him . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I found Yancy working with three other men at his warehouse outside of town. A big truck from Boston was being unloaded while Yancy checked off cases of whiskey and supervised the transfer of some of them to his own smaller delivery truck. "The busiest day I've ever had and you come around askin' questions, Doc. Come on, give me a break!"

"I'll only take a couple of minutes," I assured him. "I have to ask about those cases of wine you delivered to Molly's last night."

"Oh—them! What about 'em?"

"Our tests show one bottle was definitely poisoned. We're trying to figure out how it could have happened."

"It didn't happen here, I'll tell you that."

"And I don't see how it could have happened at Molly's. Where does that leave? Are you saying it was poisoned before it ever reached you?"

Yancy was silent for a moment, carefully writing out Molly's name and address on the label he'd affixed to a case of bourbon. Then he laid down his fountain pen and said, "You're approaching this from the wrong angle, Doc. Why don't you start asking questions about Mayor Cresson, and what went on at his hunting lodge over near Shinn Corners?"

"What's that mean?"

"You find out," Yancy said. "I gotta get back to work."

He walked away, yelling at one of the men who was awkwardly balancing a case of gin. I saw there was no hope of getting any more information out of him then, so I went back to my car and drove into town. I drove past Pilgrim Memorial Hospital where my office was located and continued out North Road until I came to the mayor's house. It seemed deserted at first, but then I saw a flicker of the front curtain and knew someone was watching me. I parked and went up to the door. Before I could knock, it opened and Susan Cresson faced me.

"What do you want, Doctor?"

I'd never considered the mayor's wife to be a beautiful woman, but now in her moment of grief there was something oddly appealing about her. "I'm helping Sheriff Lens with the investigation of your husband's death."

"His murder," she corrected.

"Well, that's probably the case but we can't be certain. It might have been some sort of bizarre accident."

"Do you believe that?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I don't know what to believe right now. Could I come in and ask you a few questions?"

"I'm leaving in ten minutes for the funeral parlor. I have to complete the arrangements. Has Edmund's body been released yet?"

"Yes. The autopsy is complete."

She led me into a large living room furnished in a surprising combination of colonial and contemporary. "I suppose it was poison."

I nodded. "The wine bottle was loaded with it. Who would want to kill your husband, Mrs. Cresson?"

"No one. He was a very popular man. He was elected mayor by a large majority."

"I understand he had a hunting lodge over near Shinn Corners."

"Yes, he and his cronies." She picked up a ring of keys and dropped them into her purse. "I hardly ever went there. It was always stag."

"What cronies were those?" I asked.

"Oh, Doctor Wayne from the hospital, and John Finnigan. Phil Yancy, too, I think. Before he died, Gus Franklin used to go sometimes. They didn't really hunt. I gathered it was more for card-playing and drinking."

"Would it be possible for me to visit the lodge? It could hold a clue to your husband's death."

"Where did you get that idea?"

"It's just something I heard. Perhaps you have a key to the place on your ring there."

"No, these are just the house and car keys. I don't know where he kept the lodge key and I don't have time to look for it now." She was obviously anxious to leave.

"As I remember, he was always an extremely precise person. I'm sure you know exactly where his keys are."

She sighed and led the way into the study. A homemade key rack with rows of nails hung on one wall. She chose one of the labeled keys and handed it to me. "You're right about his being precise. When he picked that bottle of sherry for his first drink, I knew exactly which one he'd choose. He started at the upper left-hand corner every time, just as if he were reading a book or a newspaper."

"Did many people know that?"

"He was the same way with a square cake or a meat loaf. He'd always cut the upper left-hand corner first. Anyone who knew him must have noticed it. Alderman Finnigan kidded him about it sometimes."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I dropped the key into my pocket. "I'll return this as soon as I can," I told her.

I don't know what I expected to find at the hunting lodge, but Yancy had said to ask questions about what went on there and I figured I should start by looking the place over. It was a rustic log building, more of a house than a cabin, with the upstairs divided into four bedrooms. The furnishings were plentiful though not fancy. After a quick tour of the place, I settled down to go over it in more detail.

There were ashes in the fireplace, indicating the lodge had probably been used that fall, maybe during the hunting season that was just ending. A man as precise and meticulous as Mayor Cresson wouldn't have been likely to leave a dirty fireplace from the previous winter. I prowled around the cupboards and the upstairs bedrooms, not really knowing what I sought. After about thirty minutes, I was ready to give up when a small leather pouch in one of the drawers caught my eye. Inside were a number of black gummy balls.

I froze as the sound of an opening door reached me from downstairs. Pulling the drawstrings of the pouch shut, I returned it to the drawer and hurried out of the bedroom to confront the intruder. We met on the stairs. It was Dr. Wayne. "Ah, Hawthorne!" he greeted me, as if we were in a corridor at the hospital. "I wondered whose car that was outside. I didn't realize you had a key to this place."

Wayne was older than me, around fifty, and his bushy hair was already grey. I never saw him outside of work, but he seemed to be a knowledgeable physician who worked long hours. He often sat yawning at staff meetings, but I couldn't blame him for that. "Mrs. Cresson gave it to me," I explained. "I'm helping Sheriff Lens with his investigation."

"Back at the detective work, are you?" he asked with a bit of a smirk. It had always been something of a joke to him. "I'm sure the Prohibitionists are behind it somehow, trying to turn everyone away from drinking now that it's legal again."

"What brings you way out here?"

Wayne had paused on the stairs, waiting for me to let him pass. "I left some clothes here from our last hunting trip—thought I should pick them up while I still can."

"You had your own key?"

"Certainly." He showed it to me. "A few of us came here often on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weekends, just to relax. Edmund was very generous with it, and we enjoyed the place. I suppose that's all over now."

"Who came with you?"

"Alderman Finnigan, and Phil Yancy. Usually there were just the four of us."

I nodded. "I'm going to look around downstairs."

Wayne was back down a few minutes later with a hunting jacket and a rifle in a leather case. "I'll miss our get-togethers," he said.

"Did Mrs. Cresson ever come out with her husband?" I asked.

"Not when we were here." He went out the front door. "See you back at the hospital, Sam."

I watched him drive away and then went back upstairs to the drawer I'd been examining. The leather pouch was gone.

Back in Northmont, I checked in with April to see if there'd been any patient emergencies. When she told me everything was quiet, I called the jail to speak with Sheriff Lens. His deputy told me he was at Molly's Cafe, so I drove over there.

Molly herself was in the checkroom between the inner and outside doors, applying a final coat of paint to the walls. "Didn't have time for this yesterday," she told me. "Now probably no one will come anyway."

"Maybe they'll want to see the place where the mayor was killed. Did you get the rest of your liquor from Yancy?"

"Yeah, he sent a truck in with it. How about the case of sherry you and the sheriff took last night?"

"They had to open all the bottles to test them. They didn't find any more poison. Maybe we should check that port, too, just to be safe."

"You can have one bottle. I can't afford to lose another case."

"Where's the sheriff?"

"Inside." She motioned with a paint-stained finger. "Talking with John Finnigan."

The alderman looked up as I entered, and I saw he had a bottle of Scotch and a glass in front of him. He hadn't wasted any time taking advantage of Repeal. "Come in for a little drink, Doc?" he asked.

"Too early in the day for me." I motioned to Sheriff Lens and we went out to the kitchen where we could talk.

"Find out anything?" he asked.

I gave him a report on the lack of poison in the other bottles, then

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

told him of my conversation with Yancy and my subsequent visit to the hunting lodge. "I'm convinced it's tied in with the murder," I said, "but I don't know how."

"I really appreciate your help. I been trying to get the alderman to tell me if there was any trouble at the town council meetings, but he says everything was fine."

"I think everything was, in town here. It was what happened at the lodge that caused the trouble. I'm going back to talk with Phil Yancy again, but first I want to get one of those port bottles from Molly."

By the time I returned to Yancy's warehouse, the activity of that morning had all but ceased. Only one man was unloading a truck and I asked him where I could find the boss.

"Yancy?" he replied. "He's inside somewhere. I haven't seen him in a couple of hours, not since I got back from lunch."

I entered the warehouse and called his name, surprised at the number of cases of whiskey that had arrived since morning. A long corridor of boxes ran from the loading dock to his office, enough to keep the county in liquor for a long time to come. "Yancy!" I called again. "Where are you? It's Sam Hawthorne!"

I was nearly to the office when I spotted a trickle of something wet on the warehouse floor. It was coming from behind the boxes. When I investigated, I found Phil Yancy. He'd been shot in the back at close range and he was dead.

Sheriff Lens straightened up from examining the body. "How long you figure he's been dead, Doc?"

"A couple of hours, I'd guess. Charlie, the fellow working outside, hadn't seen him since lunchtime. Chances are he was dead when Charlie got back here."

"You think it's tied in with the poisoning of Mayor Cresson?"

"More than likely. Maybe someone paid him to put the potassium cyanide in that bottle before he delivered it."

"How'd he get it into the sealed bottle?"

"That's just one of our problems. I'm beginning to wonder if the Prohibitionists might not be behind this after all. Maybe they're poisoning bottles of wine and liquor all over the country, in a last-ditch effort to scare people away from drinking again."

"That would be crazy, Doc."

"Yes, it would. But if they paid Yancy to poison that bottle somehow, they may have wanted him dead before he could talk."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"There could be a whole other motive for Yancy's murder, though," the sheriff pointed out. "You said he told you to check out the mayor's hunting lodge. Maybe he was killed to keep him from telling any more about what went on there."

"It's possible," I agreed. "Tell me, were you with John Finnigan all afternoon at Molly's?"

"Hell, no. I just got there a little while before you did. And Finnigan hadn't been there long, either."

"All right," I decided. "I'm going to the hospital. We'll do an autopsy as soon as possible, but I don't think it'll turn up anything startling. It looks like a bullet wound from a small-caliber pistol."

"Somebody he knew, you think?"

"He turned his back on the killer," I pointed out. "Or else someone sneaked up on him."

Sheriff Lens shook his head, his eyes sad. "This is a heck of a business, Doc. Sometimes I think I'm gettin' too old for it."

Back at the hospital, I ran a routine test on the bottle of port Molly had given me. There was no poison in it. Of the twenty-four bottles available, Mayor Cresson had chosen the only deadly one. Was it an accident or murder? I remembered what his wife had told me of his precise habits.

The case of sherry still sat on the work table in my office, and I studied the carefully written address label for Molly's Cafe. I recognized Phil Yancy's handwriting in the sharp, clear curves his fountain pen had made and remembered seeing him addressing other cases at the warehouse that morning. He'd seemed so alive just a few hours ago, pleased that the end of Prohibition had made him an honest man at last.

Staring down at the label, I suddenly knew who had killed Mayor Cresson, and how, and why.

It was late afternoon when I entered Molly's. There were no other customers. "The alderman finally go home?" I asked.

She looked up from the newspaper she was reading. "Someone came in with the news about Yancy and he hightailed it out of here in a hurry. It was like he'd seen a ghost."

"I suppose he felt as if he had, when you think about it," I told her, settling down at the bar. "There were five people used to go up to the mayor's hunting lodge, and now three of them are dead."

"Three?"

"Cresson and Yancy and your husband Gus."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Molly took a bottle from behind the bar. "Have a drink on the house, Sam."

"You killed them, didn't you?" I asked quietly.

"What are you talking about? I was in Boston when Gus hanged himself."

"I don't mean Gus. I mean the other two—Cresson and Yancy."

She poured a careful ounce of bourbon into a glass, added water and ice, and set it in front of me. "If you believe that, you probably think this drink is poisoned, too."

I didn't look at the glass. "You killed the mayor because of Gus, because of what they were doing up at that lodge."

"What was that?" she asked blankly.

"You know as well as I do, Molly. They were smoking opium. The addiction drove your husband to suicide, and that's why you killed Mayor Cresson."

"You do come up with some wild ideas, Sam! Suppose you tell me how you dreamed this one up."

"Gladly. I was at the lodge today and found some black gummy balls—raw opium, ready to be inserted into a pipe for smoking. Dr. Wayne showed up and took them. I suppose he's the one who was supplying the opium in the first place. I should have guessed something like that long ago from the way he was yawning at staff meetings. Uncontrollable yawning is a common symptom of opium withdrawal."

"All right," Molly said. "Now tell me how I could have poisoned a sealed bottle of wine and then gotten Mayor Cresson to drink it."

I raised my eyes from the untouched glass of bourbon on the bar between us. "You injected it through the seal and the cork with a hypodermic syringe, perhaps one your husband had used for other drugs. No one would have noticed the tiny hole in the seal, or if it was noticeable you could easily cover it with a drop of wax. The potassium cyanide came from your father's electroplating plant in Boston. It's commonly used in such places."

"You're forgetting one thing, Sam. Everyone saw Yancy deliver the wine. It was never out of sight till Cresson opened that bottle."

"We *thought* we saw Yancy deliver it. But it was here all the time, probably on the floor of the checkroom just inside the door, covered with papers or a cloth. It was raining hard last night and Yancy walked in shaking water from his coat. He carried the cases of wine on his shoulder, yet the handwritten label on top was unsmudged by rain. That was impossible, unless the wine was here in the build-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing all the time. I think he delivered it earlier in the day. You poisoned it and left the two cases in the checkroom, asking Yancy to return and carry it in here for a more dramatic arrival after Prohibition ended. He did it, of course, never suspecting you'd poisoned one of the bottles. Today, when he threatened to reveal that the wine was here earlier, you had to shoot him. Sheriff Lens told me he and the alderman were only here briefly this afternoon, which means you could have driven out to the warehouse and killed Yancy during the lunch hour."

"You're clever, Sam. I always knew you were clever."

"The mayor's precise habits were well known to his friends. You might have observed them yourself, or your husband might have mentioned them. In either event, you knew he'd choose that upper left-hand bottle. You were the one who turned the cases, positioning them so the poisoned bottle was in the right place. You were the one who urged Cresson to choose one and have the first drink. If by chance he'd chosen another bottle, there was no harm done. You'd simply have tried again some other time."

Her face relaxed into a wry smile, as if she'd reached a decision. "This was the other time, Sam. I tried to do it right after Gus killed himself, knowing that Cresson's opium parties drove him to it, but I botched the job. This time there were no slip-ups."

"What if he'd chosen the port instead of the sherry?"

"I poisoned a corner bottle in that case, too. Naturally it wasn't the one I gave you to analyze."

I pointed a finger at the bourbon. "Did you poison this, too, Molly, in case I'd figured it out?"

"That's safe. You can drink it."

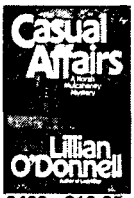
"I think I won't."

Molly shrugged. "It's your choice. But I can't let a glass of good bourbon go to waste." She picked it up before I could move and drank it down.

"They buried Molly on the same day as her two victims," Dr. Sam said, finishing his story as he finished his brandy. "I often think of her and of how close I came to being victim number three. When you come again I'll tell you about the summer of '33, when the circus came to town."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DYING FOR A GOOD MYSTERY?



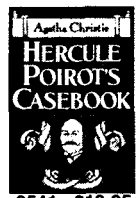
3483 $16.95

3491 $13.95

4473 $15.95

4481 $14.95

4499 $17.95

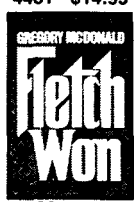


3541 $18.95

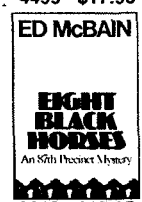
3533 $14.95

3863 $15.95

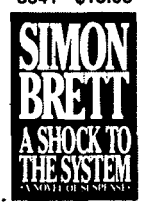
3871 $12.95



8920 $14.50



8912 $15.95



8961 $13.95

Any 6 for Only 99¢ with membership

Values up to $113.20 in Publishers' Editions.

How The Mystery Guild works: Get 6 exciting books for 99¢ (plus shipping and handling) PLUS a *free* tote bag when accepted as a member. We reserve the right to reject any application. However, once accepted as a member, if you are not satisfied, return the books at Club expense within 10 days. Your membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing.

Big selection, big savings! About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), you'll get the Club bulletin describing the featured Selections and Alternates. Plus, up to 4 times a year, you may receive offers of special Selections—all at discounts off publishers' prices. To get the featured Selections, do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically. If you prefer an Alternate or no book at all, return the form provided with your preference by the date specified. That date allows you 10 days to decide. If you have less than 10 days and get an unwanted Selection, return it at Club expense and owe nothing. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments.

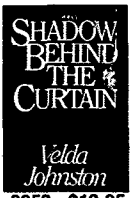
Easy purchase plan! You need buy only 4 books at regular low Club prices during your first year of membership; then continue to enjoy Club benefits without obligation or resign at any time. The Mystery Guild offers its own complete, hardbound editions, sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save you even more.

Ⓧ Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.

Guild editions save you up to 60% off publishers' list prices quoted above.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

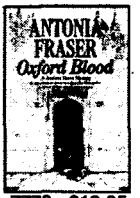
3905 $15.95



8953 $13.95

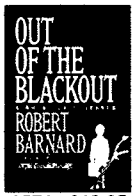
7757 $15.95

7765 $14.95



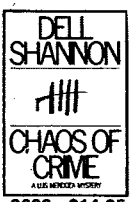
7773 $12.95

3582 $15.95



3574 $12.95

4507 $12.95



3608 $14.95

3590 $11.95

0968 $13.95

1040 $15.95

3020 $15.95

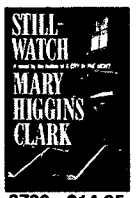
8771 $15.95

4309 $22.40

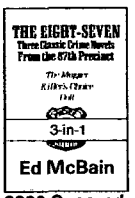
8755 $16.95

0687 $20.00

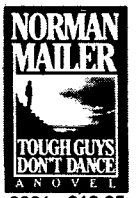
8748 $14.95



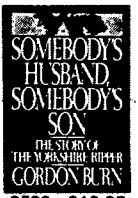
8730 $14.95



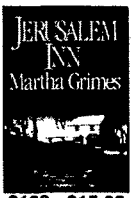
3236 Spec. ed.



3301 $16.95



0539 $16.95



2139 $15.95

3285 $15.95

Detach and mail this coupon today.

FREE TOTE
with membership

THE MYSTERY GUILD®

Dept. BS-265, Garden City, N.Y. 11535

Please accept my application for membership in The Mystery Guild and send me the 6 books indicated below plus my FREE tote bag. Bill me 99¢ plus shipping and handling. I understand that I need buy only 4 books at regular low Club prices during the first year of my membership to complete my commitment. My membership will be subject to the terms and conditions presented in this ad.

No-risk guarantee: If not delighted after examining my 6 selections, I may return the books within 10 days at Club expense. My membership will be cancelled and I will owe nothing. I may keep the FREE tote bag in any case.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Mr.
Ms. _____
(Please print)
Address _____ Apt. No. _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
If under 18, parent must sign. _____

Members accepted in the U.S.A. and Canada only.
Offer slightly different in Canada.

35-MG25

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT BARNARD

The Woolmingtons had been raised to a barony in 1901, for the first Lord Woolmington had lent Edward VII a large sum of money to cover a gambling debt when he was Prince of Wales. It would in truth have been better for the family if he had repaid the loan, for shortly after the First World War they had been forced to sell Woolmington Hall to a speculative builder, who had pulled it down and built half timbered semis. The Lords Woolmington had retired to Hardacre, adding Hall to its name, and had been there ever since, dwindling . . .

HARDACRE HALL

by ROBERT BARNARD

In any league table of Britain's stately homes, Hardacre Hall would not figure in the top ten. Nor in the second ten, nor yet in the ten after that. Only in a list of the least stately homes open to the public could Hardacre be expected to be given any prominence. People wondered why Lord Woolmington bothered to open it at all, for the receipts could hardly recompense him for his trouble, but the fact is that it gave him and Lady Woolmington an interest, and something to talk about. "That chappie with the dentures—insurance salesman, wouldn't y'say?" Woolmington would chuckle at the end of his day's activity of showing the occasional visitors round in ones and twos. "And did you notice that frightful woman's hat?"

Lady Woolmington, Cissie, sat in the entrance hall in an old print frock, a little electric fire by her besocked ankles, and took the money—a pound a time for adults, fifty pence for children, pensioners, and the unemployed. When the money was safely in her pos-

© 1986 by Robert Barnard.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

session, she would say: "Tours of the house go on the hour and the half hour," and the visitor was compelled to mooch around the hall for anything up to twenty-five minutes, watched over by a dyspeptic moose over the main door which had one eye falling disconcertingly out of its socket. Almost never did anyone else come during this wait, and Lady Woolmington would make bright remarks such as, "This rain's keeping people away," or "In this heat people want to be outside." The implication that normally the house was athrong with tourists was not one the visitors ever tested. Visitors never came back.

Hardacre Hall was, in truth, only the pokey dower house where generations of dowager Lady Woolmingtons had been shunted off by their newly ennobled sons. True it was built in 1818, but it only proved that inelegant and inconvenient domestic architecture was not suddenly born with the Victorian age any more than prudery or hypocrisy was.

The Woolmingtons had been country squires and baronets in Pendleshire for two centuries, and had been raised to a barony in 1901, for the first Lord Woolmington had lent Edward VII a large sum of money to cover a gambling debt when he was Prince of Wales. It would in truth have been better for the family if he had repaid the loan, for shortly after the First World War they had been forced to sell Woolmington Hall to a speculative builder, who had pulled it down and built half timbered semis. The Lords Woolmington had retired to Hardacre, adding Hall to its name, and had been there ever since, dwindling.

Promptly on the hour, Lord Woolmington would potter in. He would go around shaking hands with the waiting party of two or three, saying, "Rotten day, isn't it?" or "Gardens need rain, what?" Then the tour would commence.

The rooms open to the public—the dining room, the drawing room, the green bedroom, and the library—left the minds of the more discriminating visitors boggling as to what the unseen rooms could contain. Bumbling along through the dark and ill-decorated rooms crammed with undistinguished or positively decrepit furniture, Lord Woolmington would seize arbitrarily and unpredictably on some article or other and proffer it before the visitor's listless gaze.

"That's a knife," he would proclaim after a lunge at the mantelpiece had yielded a shoddy little tourist souvenir from the Iberian peninsula. "Sent by m'cousin Maud from Oporto. Family tradition says it's Toledo steel. Shouldn't think so m'self." For favored visitors,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he would add: "Retired there for her health, m'cousin Maud, so she said. *We* thought it was for the port."

So the tour continued. Here was the second baroness's work basket—"just as she left it." Here in a glass case was a pike caught by the seventh baronet: "Not 'specially large, but it was practically the only time he caught anything at all." He would flick his hand at an old candelabrum in a dusty corner, in the holders of which were dried arrangements done by his cousin Sylvia in 1957: "Candlesticks. That sort of thing appeal to you?" Here was a picture of the first baron in his 1911 Coronation robes, here was the present Lady Woolmington, before her marriage, doing her debutante's curtsey before Edward VIII, he looking positively lethal in his boredom. The second baron's saddle and the first baroness's false front did not add significantly to the interest of the place, nor did the library, which contained bound *Punch*es from 1840 until they could no longer afford to take it, a large collection of old green Penguins, and the odd copy of *Men Only*.

In the middle of this fascinating collection of forgetabilia, Lord Woolmington's mind was often distracted by things of even less import. "There's last week's *Radio Times*," he would mutter, and the visitor would shoot a glance there as if it were a collector's item. Or, "Don't tell me Ben's done his business by the coal scuttle," he would fret, and the visitor would keep his distance, since Ben had already been identified as the old sheepdog, faithful of heart if incontinent of bowel, who accompanied every guided tour.

Sometimes in undistinguished houses the discriminating visitor's spirits are kept up by the hope of discovering some gem from an Old Master's hand. Not at Hardacre Hall. "That's a genuine Witherspoon," Lord Woolmington would say, darting into a dark corner. "Friend of Whistler's, y'know." The nearest any member of the family had come to being painted by a "name" had been when John Singer Sargent was engaged to paint the wife of the first Lord Woolmington. "Couldn't come. Dose of the clap or some damned thing. Sent this chap Bootle instead. Came a damned sight cheaper."

The visitor gazed for a moment at the wife of the first baron, in pink-and-purple cretonne, against a background of Sheffield fog, and then Lord Woolmington was away again. "And this is an Atkinson Grimshaw. Boar Lane, Leeds. Know Leeds at all?" Only when they were nearly back at the entrance hall did the visitor momentarily perk up when Lord Woolmington suddenly barked: "That's a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Turner." Only to sink when he added: "Reproduction. Got it at the Tate Gallery Shop. Always did like Folkestone."

At the end of the tour the victims slunk speechless away. Few attempted to tip the guide, but if one should, an American or an Australian, Lord Woolmington murmured genially, "Quite unnecessary, thank you very much," and pocketed the base coin.

When the last tour had set off—if there was one—at half past five, Lady Woolmington went down to the gate and swiveled round the sign to read CLOSED FOR THE DAY. Then she ambled off to the kitchen to prepare the haddock or the lamb chops she had bought for their dinner. After dinner they watched television in the library, or played Happy Families, or sometimes Lord Woolmington walked into the village to the Woolmington Arms, where he was an honored customer despite the fact that, in the manner of his kind, he always accepted offers of drinks but never made them.

It was in the Woolmington Arms that the turn in the house's fortunes was first publicly broached.

"Took twenty pounds today," Lord Woolmington announced to Jim behind the bar. "Can't remember when I last took that much." Which was not surprising, for he never had. To celebrate, he added: "*Best* bitter, please, Jim."

Lord Woolmington did not expect that this was anything other than a flash in the pan. The next day's takings were down to an ordinary ten pounds, the day after to fourteen. But on Saturday they took twenty-five pounds, and the Wednesday after thirty-four. Not once in that week did they go below twenty.

"Double whisky, please, Jim," Lord Woolmington began saying, in the Woolmington Arms.

At the end of that second week of prosperity, he went to a jumble sale in Little Pemberley and bought a chamber pot, which he began displaying to visitors as the first Lady Woolmington's. "Waterworks trouble, y'know," he always added. One or two other things that he picked up at auctions or second-hand shops he incorporated imaginatively into the family tradition.

The fact was, Lord Woolmington and Hardacre Hall were becoming a fashionable joke. It had not happened by accident. It all came back to Edwina, Countess of Carbury, who lived at Burtlesham Towers some twenty miles away. Pendleshire had in fact been swallowed up during the last local government reorganization but one and was now part of Greater Cumbershire, but the Pendleshire gen-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

try and aristocracy were a clannish lot and they stuck together. Thus Lady Carbury knew the Woolmingtons quite well and thought them "a tremendous scream." One day she had been driven by rain to stop at the Hall with some visitors from London—journalists, for she was herself saleroom correspondent for *The Country Lady*—and Lady Woolmington had insisted on believing they had come not to call but to take the guided tour. "Five quid it cost me!" Lady Carbury said ruefully to her husband afterward. But she had not been unaware that her guests had found the tour of the house gloriously risible and had spent much of the time in the car back to Burtlesham giving spirited imitations of Lord Woolmington's dottier pronouncements and odder mannerisms.

"The joke of it is," Lady Carbury said, in the middle of her guests' mirth, "that in among all that junk he's got the most lovely Atkinson Grimshaw."

And her guests, most of whom had never heard of Atkinson Grimshaw, nodded wisely until someone shrieked, "That's m'Great Aunt Flora's tea-caddy!" and the car rocked with laughter again.

The Countess's mention of Atkinson Grimshaw was a matter—as most things were with the Countess—of pure calculation. Burtlesham Towers was a very different kind of stately home to Hardacre. It was run most efficiently by the young Earl and his Countess: it had an adventure playground and a tropical aviary, a collection of Chippendale and a fine Van Dyke, to say nothing of a Gainsborough and two Sir Thomas Lawrences. It was a house that coach parties visited and families made the object of day outings, and it advertised on railway stations throughout the North. Nevertheless, the Earl and the Countess were regrettably short of the ready, and the Countess was—in wish if not in fact—an expensive young lady who had perpetual and urgent uses for the ready. Hence, of course, her taking on the job of saleroom correspondent.

Now to sell off any of the house's real treasures was out of the question. The Earl would never have consented, and to do so would have been self-defeating since it must lessen the appeal of the house to the public at large. In addition, all the really important pictures were part of an entail which it would have been costly and time-consuming to undo.

There were, on the other hand, works by lesser hands, among them three Atkinson Grimshaws, bought by a Victorian ancestor from the Leeds artist to make less grim some of the guest bedrooms in the East Wing. These the Earl would never regret, could surely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be persuaded to sell. Thus, over a few months previous to Hardacre's sudden access of visitors, there had crystalized in the Countess's mind a plan—not a criminal conspiracy, for it certainly is not criminal to increase in value one's own possessions—but a series of delicate maneuvers which would have precisely that effect.

Twice over the last year the Countess's column in *The Country Lady* had hinted that if there *was* an artist whose stock was rising, it was that fascinating late-Victorian Atkinson Grimshaw, whose atmospheric townscapes were fascinating experiments with light, and so on and so on. It was a name, too, that the Countess continually yet delicately brought into conversations with friends on the fringes of the art world.

On the one hand, such delicate maneuverings seemed likely to have but marginal success. If, on the other hand, the campaign to boost Grimshaw's saleable value could be linked with someone with the capacity to be a personality of some kind—

Thus, when those first visitors had gone, the Countess began to think about her visit to Hardacre Hall, and to conceive a strategy that was half joke, half serious. The first stage began when she started to talk at parties about Hardacre and the Woolmingtons as if they were the latest, most exquisitely *in* thing.

"Have you been to Hardacre, darling?" she would ask. "It is the most *ab*solute scream. Woolmington himself—Wooffy—is perfectly priceless, and his tour of the house is one of *the* great comic turns of the century."

And always, after some surprisingly vivid imitations, she would add: "And the funny thing is, you know, that he really has this *one* thing—this quite gorgeous Atkinson Grimshaw! One of the very best specimens!"

Thus, in the manner of these things, Hardacre Hall began to be talked about, began to get visited, first by the Countess's friends, and their friends. Then, as usually happens, the fashion gradually percolated downward, so that as the summer wore on people in pubs and Women's Institutes might be heard imitating "Wooffy" Woolmington's guided tours:

"And that's a genuine Witherspoon!" someone would say, to gales of laughter. Or, "That's m'sister's christening spoon. Traveler chappie once offered me three pounds for that, but I didn't take it." And as often as not they would add: "The joke of it is, he's got this absolutely marvelous Atkinson Grimshaw. You know, the Leeds artist. I don't think he realizes how good it is . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The success of Hardacre and Lord Woolmington could not remain merely local. The second stage of Lady Carbury's campaign would in any case have seen to that. That stage envisaged the whole thing going national. In July there was a five-minute feature on the BBC's *Look North* program when a very snooty young lady was rendered speechless by Lord Woolmington's rambles through the detritus of his family's history. Then the *Observer* Color Supplement chose him for their "A Room of My Own" series and photographed him among the aristocratic rubble, with the Atkinson Grimshaw prominent in the background. ("I'll skin you alive if you don't get that in," the Countess had told the photographer.)

Soon gossip writers began to call, and though they soon found that he knew no one who was anyone outside Pendleshire, they were enchanted by his personality and wrote cod articles about the splendors of his stately home. Everybody loves a lord, but they go quite overboard about a dotty lord. In Germany or Italy Lord Woolmington might have been locked up, or at least put in the care of some strong-minded relative. In Britain he was encouraged to speak in the House of Lords, asked to open supermarkets, put on the team of *Any Questions*.

Not that he accepted all these signifiers of fame and popularity. "Damned cheek!" he often said when reading through some of the requests he received. Still, some of them were very lucrative. When he went to the Woolmington Arms of an evening, he often now took Lady Woolmington with him, even bought her an elaborate and expensive cocktail that had been popular in her youth. More often there were people there who were anxious to buy drinks for them. "Quite unnecessary—thank you very much," Wooffy would murmur.

Meanwhile, the sale price of Atkinson Grimshaws began steadily yet appreciably to rise. Little ladies in crumbling Leeds terraces found that the picture that had hung over their fireplaces for as long as they could remember was by the same artist as the picture that Lord Whatsit was always photographed in front of. A good specimen—and Grimshaw at his best was an extremely competent painter—might before all the fuss began fetch anything up to five thousand. As Grimshaws emerged from cellars and attics, they failed to sate the demand for him. It grew. Seven thousand, ten thousand, twelve thousand became commonplace. "He has been *much* underrated," the art historians claimed as prices soared (a case of art imitating commerce).

Working behind the scenes, the Countess ensured that the Tate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bought one, the Manchester Gallery another. All her visitors were sent off back south with injunctions that they must stop at Leeds on the way down and see all the Grimshaws in the Leeds Gallery. And if they *could* get into the Grand Hall of the Leeds Grand Theatre, they really should seize the chance.

"It's daylight robbery," a fellow saleroom correspondent unknowingly whispered to her when a Grimshaw was knocked down for seventeen thousand.

The Countess shrugged. "So is a Turner for eight million, great artist though he is."

The crucial thing, of course, was to recognize when the fad had reached its peak. She understood that some American interest had to be created in Grimshaw, but she also understood the limits of her talents, and Grimshaw's—well enough to realize that there was never going to be a Grimshaw craze in the States. He was from an unfashionable period in British art and he seemed unadventurous and provincial beside his contemporaries, the French Impressionists the Americans so besottedly admire. Grimshaw was never going to be bought by the Metropolitan, nor even by that snapper-up of everybody else's trifles, the Getty. Still, there were specialist galleries, dealers with whom she had contacts, and she had a couple of little house-parties for such people—took them to Leeds and Hardacre, showed them Burtlesham's own Grimshaws. It created a little ripple of interest among cognoscenti in the States.

It was when she was entertaining her third party of American experts that the Countess began to feel that the time was ripe for a quick kill. To leave it much longer might mean the brief revival had passed its peak. One of the Americans, the director of a gallery in the Midwest with a sizable and intensely boring collection of late Nineteenth Century American and British paintings, had begun putting out delicate feelers in a way the Countess recognized very well. Grimshaw would add a touch of near-distinction to his undistinguished collection. He wanted to buy.

She took him over to Hardacre, of course.

"There's the most divine Grimshaw there. *Wooffy* won't sell, of course. It's about the only thing the poor darling *has* got."

She timed it so they were just in time for the four o'clock tour. "You have to do the tour. It's the combination of Wooffy's *price*less performance with the reactions of people to it."

The Americans loved the tour, loved Wooffy. All of them watched

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him intently, treasuring up details of the performance to retail to family and friends back home. When the gallery director from the Midwest lingered in front of the Atkinson Grimshaw, Lord Woolmington shoved him forward. "Come along, come along! I want you to see this genuine Witherspoon!"

After the tour, the Americans sampled a new departure for Hardacre: tea and horrible floury currant scones, made in the mornings before the house opened by Cissie Woolmington herself and served in the kitchen by a slow girl from the village. The Countess knew better than to sample these delights. She stayed behind to talk to Wooffy, and on an impulse of generosity said to him:

"You know, Wooffy, in three or four months' time, you ought to sell that Grimshaw. You'll get five or six times what you would have got twelve months ago, and I don't know that he might not start sliding soon."

Then the Americans came up from the kitchen, belching bicarbonate. He'll bring it up on the journey home, thought the Countess, and she didn't mean Lady Woolmington's scones.

And he did. He didn't want to be pushy or out of line, he said, but was there a chance that Earl Carbury might consider—

"You know, darling, I think he *might*. We're not really in the business of *selling* paintings, you know, but those are hardly part of the artistic treasury of the house. He'd have to be per*suad*ed. I don't know what sort of sum you were thinking of offering?"

"Say sixty thousand for the three."

"*Pounds*, I take it. Not that it makes much difference these days. I think you know you ought to be prepared to up it by five, even ten, don't you, depending on his reaction? Sixty-five thousand? Even seventy? Because I do know he'll need to be persuaded. Best all round if I don't appear in all this, don't you think? You make the offer and I'll do what I can behind the scenes. George is a dear soul, but just a trifle stick-in-the-mud, and he has this thing about the family heritage—"

They had driven past the public car park and round the drive to the front of the house. The Countess was so taken up with the conversation that she had drawn to a halt before she realized that also pulled up there were three white police cars and that a constable was standing in the great doorway.

"My God! What's happened? Don't tell me there's been an accident in the Adventure Playground!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She had jumped out and shouted, "What is it? What's happened?" to the constable at the door when the figure of the Earl, red-faced but solicitous, appeared through it.

"Don't worry, darling. Don't panic. Somehow the security seems to have broken down. There's been a theft. Must have been one of the visitors."

"Oh, my God!"

"Calm down. It sounds worse than it is. They've only taken the Atkinson Grimshaws. And thank heaven they're insured for six thousand."

"Y'know, I'm not at all sure I won't accept that yank's offer," said Wooffy Woolmington the next evening, over a final glass of Glenmuckitt malt whisky in the Hardacre sitting room.

"I thought you would," said Cissie, knitting peacefully, "when you didn't say no at once."

"Feel a bit guilty. Seems a damned shame, and damned hard on that nice little Edwina Carbury. Those damned thieves knew they'd never get away with the Van Dyke, and wouldn't be able to sell it if they did. There's been all this talk about Grimshaw recently, so they took him instead. Damned nonsense all this talk, what? Feller's been dead nigh on a hundred years—why should he suddenly have people talking about him, and jump in value? Some sillyarse in Bond Street got it up, I suppose."

"Thirty thousand, he said, didn't he?"

"That's what I got him to. I think we should. Apparently the fad is getting to its peak at the moment, so Edwina said. We'd feel damned fools if we refused thirty for it now, then in a year's time it's only worth five again."

"I can see that, Wooffy," said his wife. "Still, I'm not so sure. You've got to remember how well the house is doing. And the Grimshaw is one of the attractions. If that goes, there isn't anything very interesting in the picture line."

Wooffy looked at her, affronted.

"Good heavens, woman," he spluttered, touched to the quick. "What arrant nonsense! There's Bootle's picture of m'grandmother! And what about the genuine Witherspoon?"

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Boley-McKee story by

JOHN F. SUTER

"Parsons is deliverin' a body and *a coffin?" said McKee. "How will they explain that funny-lookin' grave if there's no casket in it?"*

Boley swerved to miss a possum on the highway. "I'm not sure—but I think they put an empty box in its place."

An old pine box, *he thought. His skin prickled. A line of an old song went through his mind, a song he had associated with trouble twice before . . .*

FOR A COFFIN OF PINE

by JOHN F. SUTER

Geneva Boley held up two artificial cemetery decorations, one in each hand. In her left hand was a miniature double-casket spray type of simulated yellow roses and fern fronds. Her right hand held a small wreath of deep-red roses, lilies of the valley, and galax leaves.

"Which do you like, Arlie?" she asked.

Boley hesitated. "It's your daddy, Neva." Then, as exasperation began to appear in her brown eyes, he said, "They're both nice."

"That's my trouble." She finally handed the piece with the yellow roses to Arlan. "I think I'll take that one. Hold it while I put the wreath back."

As they left the large discount store, their twelve-year-old, Carl, carried the box to the car. His sister, Martha, two years younger, carried a small bag of her mother's miscellaneous purchases.

"I'm glad I thought of this," Geneva told Boley. "If it's going to get stolen, this is cheaper than real flowers. If they leave it alone for a week this time, I can use it again next year."

© 1986 by John F. Suter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was mid-April and the ninth anniversary of Geneva's father's death. In the nine years, she had never failed to place a decoration on his headstone. Her mother had gone to live in Arizona with Geneva's older brother, but in time she, too, would rest in the family plot in West Virginia. Although the older woman had seen the memorial only a few times, Geneva always felt that her tribute was as much for her mother's benefit as for her own.

When Boley placed the arrangement on top of the polished headstone, Geneva surveyed it with a critical eye.

"It *looks* good," she said. "Can you make it more secure?"

The wire frame of the mounting was rocking a bit. Boley held the piece up and spread the heavy wire with his strong hands, then set the arrangement back on the stone. It fit snugly. He shoved down firmly at the edges of the frame until it fit tightly. "That oughta do it," he said.

Geneva came and stood beside him, leaning against his wide shoulder. She reached up and ruffled his crinkly blond hair. "I guess you're some use, after all, Arlie," she said.

"Like what?" a dry voice asked.

They looked around. Behind them stood the sheriff, Warren McKee, a spare man with a deep tan that winter had not worn away.

"After all he's done for you, what a question," Geneva said. "What do you want from him this time?"

McKee's eyebrows lifted in surprise. "Why, nothin', Neva. They'll be havin' Ed Fleming's funeral in a bit. I couldn't make it to the service at Greenwood's Funeral Home but I can be at the graveside one." He leaned his head to his right.

Boley's gaze followed McKee's. About sixty feet to the right and on the next level down the gentle slope was a newer grave with a canopy at its head.

"That's right," he remarked. "I never knew Ed, but it was his time, from what they tell me."

Geneva cut in. "Warren, tell me something. Can't you do anything at all about these cemetery thieves?"

The sheriff gave her his attention. "Thieves?"

"Oh, don't tell me you haven't heard," she said impatiently. "You can't put out any flowers that look like anything without having them disappear almost before you can turn around."

"Oh, that. I know what you mean," McKee admitted. "I've had it happen to bouquets I've put out in Thelma's memory."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Who do you think is doing it?" Geneva persisted. "What do they do with them?"

"I don't know who. But I wouldn't be surprised if what they take ends up with some of those tailgate vendors down on Route 60."

Boley thought about it. All the way from outside Charleston, as far east as Sam Black Church, the sides of U.S. 60 were dotted with vendors selling from trunks of cars, pickups, or permanent stands. Nearly eighty miles of cheap plaster-of-paris ornaments, quilts, gaudy velvet pictures, and souvenirs. A long flea market in good weather.

"McKee, you could be right," he said. "And if you did try to check it out, how would you know for sure what was yours if you did see it?"

"You could catch 'em in the act," Geneva said. "How about it, Warren? Why don't you try that?"

"It would mean a stakeout," McKee answered. "Not throwin' off on your problem, Neva, but we have our hands full with other things most nights."

"I see what you mean," she said.

"Why don't *you* catch 'em in the act?" McKee suggested, a suspicion of a smile showing.

"I don't fancy gettin' hurt," she replied. She looked speculatively at Boley.

"I'm no more for gettin' hurt than you are," Boley said.

"Why, I don't think whoever's doin' this carries a gun," Geneva said. "You're probably bigger than they are. Maybe they're teenagers."

"Some teenagers are a pretty good size," he answered.

"Well, how about you comin' back here after dinner and keepin' an eye on things for a few hours? Wouldn't hurt you."

Boley stared malevolently at McKee. He suspected that the sheriff had known what he was stirring up when he made his remark to Geneva. "It gets pretty damp and chilly these nights," he protested.

"You don't think about that when you're out fox-huntin', sittin' on a log by a fire, sippin' whiskey while the dogs run a fox to hell and back," she retorted. "You can pleasure yourself, you can do me a favor."

Boley tried cunning. "All right, I'll come back tonight—but I want to bring Carl along."

Her mouth opened, but she shut it quickly. "Why would you want to put that young boy in danger, Arlan Boley?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Listen to who's talkin' danger now. I agree with what you said last—whoever's doin' it is probably no older than he is. But someone more grown up might be behind it. I want Carl because he has good sharp eyes."

"But—"

"Now, Neva, if you'll stop and think, you'll know that nobody's that stupid that he'd try anythin' serious just because of some flowers."

Geneva glanced at Carl. "Maybe he doesn't want to. Have you thought of that?"

Boley turned to his son. "How about it, Carl? It won't be fun just hangin' around and not doin' anythin'. It's just that an extra pair of eyes might come in handy."

The boy hesitated, then grinned. Boley suspected that he had just realized he would be let off from doing homework. "I don't mind, Dad," he said.

Boley rumpled the boy's hair, which was the color of his own but straight and fine. He really did want help, not a domestic victory, but he wasn't sure that his wife shared his view.

She was not letting him have the last word. She gestured in the direction of the superintendent's house, out of sight behind a knoll. "Willis I trust, but those two he has diggin' graves and doin' odd jobs I'm not so sure about. Suppose it's them?"

Boley shrugged. "The two of us have four eyes and two mouths between us. I hope we have sense enough to keep open what needs to be kept open. What needs to be kept shut can stay that way till the time comes to tell it."

The cemetery gate was already closed and locked when Boley and Carl returned in the jeep. Sometimes Boley kept a gun of one type or another in the vehicle, but he had none this time. He felt no need for it and he knew its absence would mollify Geneva.

"We'll park around at the side," he told the boy. "Won't be so obvious that way."

"I don't see why they lock it," Carl remarked. "Looks like all you have to do is go around to the side and walk in."

"But you can't drive in," Boley pointed out.

"What difference does that make?"

Boley thought about some aspects of this and decided not to give a complete answer. "It cuts down on vandalism. Keeps some baboons from puttin' a bumper against a headstone and pushin' it over."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He parked the jeep under a tree, where it would get less attention, and they climbed out and locked it. "You might think you can walk right in," he said, "but take a good look at the bushes all around the sides. They're barberry. You want to force your way through that? Come on, I'll show you the way in."

He led the way to a place where the front stone wall containing the gate met the beginning of the barberry hedge. He pointed to an almost invisible gap between them. "See—here. You just kind of go sideways, like this, and scrooch, and there you are."

Although Carl was skeptical about avoiding the fine thorns of the bush, he tried his father's suggestion. To his surprise, he found himself inside the cemetery unscratched.

"Hey, neat," he said. "Do you think the thieves know about this?"

"Could be," Boley admitted. "But I suspect they just carry things to the side in daytime and drop 'em over. Then they come back later."

Carl started to suggest that they patrol the cemetery's perimeter to check that theory, but Boley was already striding toward Geneva's parents' lot. Even in the fading light, the yellow decoration was plainly visible. "It's still there," he said. He looked around. "Why don't you go over to the right, then back up a little? There's a good-sized stone that ought to hide you. I think you could still see. I'll go straight back—behind that big monument."

Carl started to leave, then he stopped.

"Dad, haven't they buried Mr. Fleming yet? It looks like his coffin's still out of the ground."

Boley's eyes followed his son's pointing finger. It wasn't easy to see in the available light, but there did seem to be more at the Fleming graveside than there should have been.

"It could be. I'm not up on how they do things, but I do think I've seen coffins still above ground the next morning after a funeral."

"Wouldn't Mr. Greenwood be wantin' that thing they put the coffin on to lower it into the ground?"

He does ask the damndest questions, Boley thought. "That's his affair," he answered. "I don't pretend to know why he does what he does. Undertakin's one business I'm glad I'm not in." He touched the boy's shoulder. "Now get where you're goin'."

As he settled behind his own observation spot, he realized that his son would get bored before too long. When that happened, Boley could expect a visitor. It was only natural.

Twenty minutes passed before Boley was aware that Carl was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beside him. He mentally complimented the boy. He had not heard him coming.

"Dad, do you hear it? Do you see it?"

"All I hear is you whisperin'. See what?"

"There's some kind of car comin'. Like it came in the gate. On that drive down there—can't you see it?"

Boley listened. He could hear no motor, but he did hear the sound of tires on gravel. His eyes, following the sound instinctively, located a moving vehicle on the lower drive. "You're right," he whispered. "Somebody's managed to get in at the gate. There's enough of a downhill that he can coast and not use his motor. Looks like a half-ton pickup. What do you think?"

Carl was pleased that his father had asked his opinion. "That's what I'd guess. Hey, look, he's stoppin' there at Mr. Fleming's grave."

Boley rose a little. "You stay here. I'm movin' closer."

Carl started to protest, but Boley shushed him. "We don't know what this is about, son. You know what I promised your mother about watchin' out for you." He sensed the boy's disappointment. "If it's safe, and I need you, I'll come back for you. Okay?"

"Okay."

Before Boley started to move, he heard two car doors open and close quietly. The uncushioned sound when they shut confirmed his estimate that this was a truck, not a passenger car. It was parked between him and the Fleming grave.

He went toward the new arrivals in a half crouch, realizing that the need to avoid small markers and unexpected decorations was making him miss some of what was happening. He could hear someone opening the truck's tailgate, then a scraping, and—after an interval—a possible clink of shovels. He finally reached a large headstone about fifty feet from the truck, but there was noplace closer to hide. The grass was slippery with dew and he thought that too much movement was risky.

The twilight was long gone, and he could barely make out two heads and two pairs of shoulders moving about. Nobody was talking but whoever was there moved with assurance. It wasn't hard to reach a supposition. Whoever the two were, they were familiar with the cemetery. Willis, the superintendent, was an unlikely possibility. This left the two gravediggers.

Boley recalled the two, trying to match his estimate of the two shadows with Lawson—a stocky man with a perpetually glowering

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

expression on his swarthy face—and Parsons, a taller, lanky man, greasy-haired and putty-featured. It could be.

There was a long period when Boley could see nothing, but he could hear thuds and clattering. Then he thought he could hear the whir of the undertaker's machine, as though it were lowering the casket into the grave. Were the gravediggers working overtime, putting the casket into the grave and filling the hole? If so, why was there no light?

He thought he heard the sound as the straps disengaged and were brought back, but he was unsure. Someone had come to the rear of the truck and seemed to be making a small ramp with some short timbers. In a few minutes, this was done, and the man went around the truck again.

After a short interval, there was a sound of grunting and heavy breathing, mixed with the soft swishing of an object sliding across grass. Something was being maneuvered toward the rear of the truck.

Finally, a long dark object with a sheen in the early starlight was towed into sight by the two men bent over.

"Heavier 'n I thought," came a faint mutter.

"—both get this end and hoist," another low voice said.

Boley was jolted. The casket. They must have the casket. Then what had gone into the grave?

He had no trouble with that. He often rented his services and his heavy equipment to his neighbors in the county. He had moved enough earth himself to be able to guess what had happened. They had put something the size of a coffin into the grave so that the appearance would be right when the hole was filled.

The two men were lifting the end of the casket onto the ramp when Boley had two more thoughts. What were they up to? The following thought was that he knew, but he wanted to reject it.

With extreme caution, he backed away from the covering headstone and made his way back to where his son waited. "Carl," he said, getting out his keys, "you know how to use the CB in the jeep. Do you know the band you use to call the sheriff's office?"

"Sure. I know all of 'em."

"Good. You get back to where we came in, then over to the jeep. Don't make any noise as you go. Get on the CB and see if you can get McKee or anybody who can come over here. Tell 'em someone's in here stealin' Ed Fleming's body."

"Stealin'—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Shh. That's what I said. If nobody can come, tell 'em I'll follow this truck when it leaves and I'll get back to 'em on the CB to let 'em know what's up. You got that?"

"Yes."

"Then get goin'."

The casket was evidently in the truck, for a tarpaulin was being spread. There were subdued clankings which told Boley that heavy objects were being placed to hold down the edges of the cover. Then the tailgate of the truck was closed as quietly as possible. This was noisier than anything so far, since latching a truck's tailgate requires definite firmness.

The two graverobbers met on the far side of the truck, their backs turned to Boley. They were apparently resting, for a lighter flared and two cigarettes were lit. Boley still could not see the faces.

"That part's done," a voice came faintly.

The other said something that was not clear to Boley.

"I better go get the money," the first man said. "You fill in the hole, meet me at—"

A tug at Boley's arm distracted him. Carl had returned. Boley leaned his head down to let the boy whisper in his ear.

"Sheriff wasn't there, Dad. He went down 39 somewhere and isn't back yet. No other cars are in, so nobody can come."

As he listened to Carl, Boley saw one of the men throw away his cigarette.

"Thanks," he whispered. "Let's get back to the jeep. I want to tail this monkey when he gets out of here."

Moving as fast as possible under the conditions, they made their way back to the jeep. Behind them, they heard the truck's motor start, but it would take the driver several minutes to clear the cemetery. Boley correctly surmised that the man would use only parking lights for vision and would drive slowly. Because of the existence of only one entrance, the cemetery's drives were meandering, and the need of the man to get out twice to open and shut the gate would buy Boley the time he needed.

Before the truck emerged, Boley had positioned the jeep where he could follow at once and was talking on the CB to the sheriff's temporary office, located in an old storage room in the courthouse basement. The previous office had been destroyed in an explosion some months earlier.

"Yeah, I appreciate your position," Deputy Haines was saying to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him. "I've been in touch with McKee. You try to call him direct. He might be able to answer, and he might not."

"What's—" Boley started. "Hold it. He's comin' out now. He'll be getting out to close the gate before he takes off and I should be able to get a good look at him. —Yeah. Write this down somewhere—it's that gravedigger, Parsons."

"What's the truck? Can you get the license?"

"It's that red '79 Chevy half ton of his. I can't see the license from here. I'll give it to you when I can get it."

Another voice cut in. "Breaker. This is McKee. Repeat. McKee breakin'."

"Go ahead, Sheriff," Haines said.

"I got what you two are discussin'," McKee said. "I'm still down 39, but I'm headin' back as fast as I can. What are you peddlin', Boley? *Body*-snatchin'?"

"It looks like it," Boley said.

"Boley, life is interestin' when you stick your nose into somethin'. I'm gonna have to go along with it just to see how it comes out. You sure you're not lookin' at that floral piece through the bottom of a beer bottle?"

Boley was about to give this the answer it deserved when he remembered his son's presence. "All I can tell you is Parsons has Fleming and his coffin loaded in the back of his truck."

"Okay, then, tail him if you can and keep me posted. I hope we can keep from bein' blocked off by too many calls to the office."

The red truck began to move out to the highway, a few hundred feet away. Boley let it get well ahead, then he pulled out slowly, only his parking lights on. "I sure hope he doesn't have a CB in that truck," he muttered.

Carl had been studying the truck while Parsons had closed the gate.

"He has an antenna, Dad," he said, "but it looks like a regular one. I don't think there's a CB antenna."

Boley picked up the microphone. "Boley here. Suspect is about out to the highway. Will close after I see which way he turns. You need the license number?"

"No," McKee answered. "You gave Haines enough information. We have suspect and vehicle connected. Go ahead."

Boley saw the truck's rear lights turn left onto the highway. He drove quickly to the intersection and turned his lights to low beam. High beam would only attract Parsons' attention.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"This is Boley," he said on the CB. "Truck just entered 39 and turned left."

"Left," commented McKee. "Sounds like he might be comin' toward me. Keep close tabs, Boley." His tone became more speculative. "Suppose you're right, Boley. Why would he want that body?"

"I don't know. Why'd they ever steal bodies? Some med school's source of cadavers runnin' out, maybe?"

"It's not impossible. Nothin's impossible. But how many times have I told you my middle name should have been Thomas? Parsons is deliverin' a body *and* a coffin to boot? How will they explain that funny-lookin' grave if there's no casket in it?"

Boley swerved to miss a possum on the highway. "I'm not sure, McKee, but I think they put an empty box in its place."

An old pine box, he thought. His skin prickled. A line of an old song went through his mind, a song he had associated with trouble twice before.

For a coffin of pine—

"Boley," McKee was saying, "I'm beginnin' to believe you. A casket would be a convenient way to move a body. What about that undertaker's contraption that lets the coffin down into the hole? Do you think it was still there?"

"I'd bet on it. I'm sure they used it to lower the other box."

"Greenwood will be havin' fits when he hears this," the sheriff commented. "'Even when somethin' happens that he can't help, he takes the burden on himself. I guess the outlook goes with the business."

Boley concentrated on his driving. Town was behind him, and the highway ahead was two-lane blacktop and curving. Low hills, thickly covered with trees not yet in leaf, flanked both sides. The truck about 300 feet ahead was moving at a steady fifty.

The radio came to life again. "Boley?"

"Yeah, McKee?"

"I just thought of somethin' and I'm gonna take a shortcut. Listen: I think we'll all end up at a certain place. I won't say where on the air. When you get there, I'll probably be waitin', but you won't see me for a bit. Now don't you go chargin' right after this Parsons. You park where you won't be noticed and lock Carl in your jeep. I don't think there's any danger, but do it, anyway. I'll turn up then, and we'll check this thing together. Okay?"

"You're the law."

"All right. Here I go. Don't call unless it's unusual. See you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Boley continued on his way, following the truck. They passed an occasional house, a solitary beer joint with several cars outside, and a closed auto-repair shop. The road still had numerous curves, but Boley knew a straight stretch was coming. The truck was just going around a curve into it.

Boley swung the jeep around the curve, expecting to see the truck again, and had a sudden shock. There was no truck on the road. No taillights to be seen. The straight stretch was empty.

He knew at once what had happened. There were no intersecting roads, no farm lanes. There was a half-circle pulloff where a picnic bench had once stood on a small bank above it. Parsons must have wondered if he was being followed, pulled in, and cut his lights. He would be waiting to see who was behind him.

There was no action to take to save things. Boley could only go on and hope Parsons would forget his suspicions. Carl being in the front seat might allay the gravedigger's fears.

Without turning his head, Boley said, "Carl, I know what he's done. Just you keep lookin' at the road ahead. We're not interested in him, understand?"

"I got it, Dad."

As he passed the pulloff without changing speed, Boley could see the darkened truck parked near the spot where the picnic table had been. "I guess you see where he went," he said to Carl.

"Yeah, but what are we gonna do? We're ahead of him. We won't know where he goes."

"I'll just ask for some advice." Boley picked up the microphone. He began calling McKee, hoping he was still listening.

After almost a minute, he got a response. "Something wrong?"

"Maybe." Boley described the problem in as few words as possible.

McKee seemed to give it some thought. Finally, he responded. "I still think I know where he's headed, and I'll beat him to it. You just keep goin'. You know where Miller's farm is? He probably won't go that far, so when you're still headin' out, he'll stop worryin' and go about his business. You turn at Miller's and come back."

"Back to where?"

"I think you'll get an idea before you reach Miller's. And when you come back, you'll be sure of it. Just remember what I told you before."

"Okay."

Boley hung up the microphone and looked at Carl. "You heard all that. I'll add one more thing. Don't look back. I can see in the rear-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

views what he does." He checked both the inside rearview mirror and the one to the left outside. "Lights about a quarter mile back. Probably him."

Another mile farther on they passed a small warehouse to the right and a suspicion began to dawn. Boley watched the mirrors closely. When he had gone another quarter mile, the lights behind him slowed and swung to the right.

The next mile to Miller's farm seemed interminable, the effect heightened by the reappearance of numerous curves in the road. At last, at the entrance to Miller's lane, Boley turned the jeep around. He had already decided to check out the warehouse, and he recalled a place to stop on the opposite side of the highway.

In less than two minutes, he had reached the place—a small abandoned stone quarry. He turned off the highway at the entrance, drove in, and reversed the jeep in the stony work area.

He wasn't surprised to find a county sheriff's car already parked near the entrance, its lights off. He pulled up beside it and turned off his lights and motor. A man began to climb from the other car.

"That's McKee," he told Carl. "Now, you lock yourself in, you hear? I'm leavin' the keys, because I know you can drive if you have to. If anybody comes at you, start 'er up. Run over him if you have to."

"You don't have to worry," the boy answered.

Boley eased from the driver's seat and closed the door softly. "McKee?"

"Yeah, Boley. Glad you made it."

"I guess our friend got where he was headed."

"He's over there. Just finished lookin' in the back of his truck, then went on inside. Which is what us two are about to do."

Boley wished he could see McKee's face. "How'd you guess to come here? I wouldn't if I hadn't seen Parsons turn in."

"What you told me made it likely. You said he was headin' this way on 39, and this was the only place that tied in. The stock's a little bulky and they can't keep it all in town. It's my business to know what's where."

No cars were on the highway at the moment, which relieved Boley. The less attention he and McKee drew the better. They crossed and walked the additional hundred-plus feet to the warehouse lot. There were some lights burning inside the building but none on the outside.

"I'd like to know what's goin' on in there," Boley said.

"We'll find out just that in a minute."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Boley was looking at the sign of plain green letters on a white background: GREENWOOD. The warehouse where the undertaker stored most of his caskets, vaults, and other items.

"It makes sense, doesn't it?" McKee commented in an undertone. "I expect they even have a cold room here, in case they have to hold a body a bit longer for some reason."

He let Boley think about that, then he remarked, "If your guess is right, I wonder if they even embalmed Ed Fleming. I don't know what a medical school requires, do you?"

Boley ignored the question. "*If* my guess is right? He had no time to unload it anywhere."

McKee gripped his arm. "Keep it down. I'm about to try this door here."

He led the way silently up three steps to a platform at the end of the building. To the right of a large roll-up overhead door was an ordinary steel door. McKee tried the knob slowly. To his delight, it turned, and he could pull the door open. "Thought, expectin' the delivery, they'd have her unlocked," he whispered. "Come on."

Boley stepped in after him and McKee eased the door shut. They found themselves in an unlighted room about 25 × 30, ten or eleven feet high. There were several stacks of crates of familiar shape. A light from an office at the far end gave faint light to the storeroom, but it didn't drive away the deeper shadows. The two men started toward the lighted doorway. Voices came from inside.

"You say you had no trouble," a mild baritone voice said. "It seems to me you're later than usual."

Jim White, Greenwood's son-in-law, McKee thought.

"Lawson's off his feed. It took a bit longer," Parsons rasped.

"You'll want to be on your way," White said. "Here's your money."

Boley peered through the crack between the door and the jamb, as McKee was doing, and saw White, a short, sallow man, handing an envelope to the lanky gravedigger. A broad-shouldered workman was also in the office.

"Now," said White, "let's get the merchandise offloaded and inside."

McKee grasped Boley's arm and pulled. The two barely managed to squeeze behind a stack of crates when the lights in the room came on. The three men came out of the office and walked to the door to the loading dock. The workman unlocked a padlock on a switch and pressed a button. The overhead door rolled up on its track. As it did, Parsons went to the pickup and opened the tailgate. Then he climbed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the cab and backed the truck against the platform. Climbing out again, he and the workman removed the tarpaulin and maneuvered the casket, a gunmetal-colored model, onto a long, low handtruck. They pushed it inside and rolled the door down again.

White bent over the casket. "It looks good. It looks very good," he said.

"I'm glad you like it," said McKee, stepping into sight. He had his gun out. "Suppose all of you hold it right there."

Boley, watching the scene, wasn't sure of the workman's intentions. His hands were slowly moving along the rail of the handtruck. He stepped out of hiding.

"What is this?" White demanded.

"That's what we want to find out," McKee said. He jerked his head toward Boley. "This man thinks something's in that coffin."

"Something in it? He's crazy. What could there be—"

"What's usually in one?" McKee asked. "Open it up."

White looked at the workman. His sallow skin was flushed. "Go ahead, Rod. Open it."

The workman obeyed with swift efficiency. As he did so, White exclaimed, "Be careful with it!" McKee grinned.

The workman raised the lid cautiously.

McKee kept his eyes on the men he was guarding. "Boley," he said, "take a look."

Boley came forward, careful not to get between McKee and the others. He knelt and looked into the coffin.

It was empty.

Mechanically, he felt around the inside.

"There's nothin' here," he said, deflated.

"That's what I told you!" White barked.

Boley straightened. "Am I ever a dumb jackass," he said.

"No, you're not," the sheriff told him. "You found exactly what I thought you'd find."

"A big fat zilch?"

"Not a bit," McKee insisted. "What do you suppose our friend here gave our other friend there that money for? You saw it yourself. For bringin' back that graveside contraption that's still in the truck?" He grinned broadly. "Use your head, Boley. What he—and old Greenwood, I'd say—are doin' is recoverin' coffins whenever they can. They resell 'em and make a nice haul."

"But what became of Fleming's body?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sheriff shrugged. "Down in the hole in that old box, with all the dirt on top of it. We'll check it out, but I'll bet that's where."

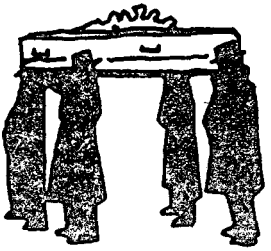
He handed Boley the gun. "Keep an eye on 'em. There's a few too many for me to drive 'em in in my car. I'll call in on the phone here and see if Evans is back."

He vanished in the direction of the office.

The workman eyed Boley. "Mister, I just work here. I had no idea what was goin' on."

"You'll have to settle that with somebody else," Boley said.

McKee came back after a short interval. "We're in luck. Evans came in and Haines filled him in on what's been goin' on. He went over to the cemetery and encountered Lawson on the way out with two shovels and a grave decoration. The floral piece was sort of a yellow thing. Sounds like somethin' I might have seen before."



DETECTIVERSE

NO MORE STRIFE

by PATRICIA F. GRAVES

"There must be a way," cried the wife,
"To get rid of the bane of my life!"
She did hubby in
With a bottle of gin
And a wee bit of help from a knife.

© 1986 by Patricia F. Graves.
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE *invites you to...*

Rendezvous With Murder

on a unique mystery tour to England, the scene of so many classic mysteries. You'll visit the Old Bailey, attend private receptions with representatives from Scotland Yard and meet prominent English mystery writers.

As an extra-special feature, you'll participate in a "Murder Weekend" at a magnificent estate where you'll spend the weekend with a "killer." Here among the guests and staff will be a few less-than-genuine characters who will unveil a murderous scenario throughout the weekend. There will be plenty of clues (and a few red herrings) for you to follow. If you can figure out whodunit, an exciting prize awaits you!

But here's a chilling note: Each tour is limited to a very small number of amateur sleuths, so we recommend you reserve your place in the plot early. Don't miss this opportunity to play detective! Chills and thrills are guaranteed!

For FREE BROCHURE Call 1-800-428-7462. In California, 1-800-457-9515.

Or Mail To:
ICTS / InterContinental Travel
4133 Taylor St., Dept. DVP
San Diego, CA 92110

Name: _____
Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____
Telephone: ( ) _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a ***NEW*** short story by

SUZANNE JONES

Jeanine's garden would be a quiet shady place with vine-covered walls and a small, almost child-sized door set within that might open onto the rest of the neat green lawn, where the children's swing set had been some years ago—so many years ago, in fact, that Jeanine was inclined to believe it had existed at some other house in some other time, and that the door might open onto an altogether different scene . . .

A SECRET PLACE

by SUZANNE JONES

"Do you ever wonder what happens to the corpses of flies?" Eric waved the fly swatter idly and fixed his wife Jeanine with the same intense look he would have leveled at an indolent graduate student. I recognized the look and stirred uneasily. I wasn't so long a widower that I couldn't identify a first thrust in a domestic skirmish.

Jeanine paused, holding the trowel in a strong tanned hand. "I suppose they get vacuumed up," she said carefully, as if she, too, recognized that his comment could be a preamble to yet another tirade on her neglect of housekeeping since starting her project. I had unhappily witnessed several.

Eric snorted. "Have you ever seen one in one of your increasingly rare stints at the vacuum cleaner?"

The justice in his remark seemed to pain her and make her more alert and cautious than ever. I watched her plump figure bend to the pail of cement as she dipped the trowel in the heavy grey mixture. "I can't say as I have."

She didn't wonder aloud, although she might have, why Eric found

© 1986 by Suzanne Jones.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it necessary to sit at the white wrought-iron table on their patio and kill flies. As futile as the activity might seem to Jeanine, she had learned not to contend with him in minor matters. Such contentions only seemed to sharpen his criticism of her and her project.

In the beginning this project of hers had passed almost beneath his notice and mine—like her romance novels or her wine in the afternoon.

She had said shyly that ever since she was a child, she had dreamed of a walled garden. A hidden, secret place. A place for special moments shut away from the everyday cares of the world. High stone walls, walls higher than her head, thick as the length of her arm, closing out the noises of their suburban neighborhood—a little more affluent than most, in keeping with Eric's status at the university, but still rather ordinary, with its neat green lawns and few trees.

Her garden would be a quiet shady place with vine-covered walls and a small, almost child-sized door set within that might open onto the rest of the neat green lawn, where the children's swing set had been some years ago—so many years ago, in fact, that Jeanine was inclined to believe it had existed at some other house in some other time, and that the door might open onto an altogether different scene.

The children had long since grown and gone, but somewhat stubbornly refused to produce children of their own, which faintly disappointed both Eric and Jeanine. Occasionally they talked about moving into a smaller house in a more fashionable location, but the very thought of moving was disruptive, and after a while they no longer discussed it.

Even though I knew her fairly well, it would be difficult for me to say just what had brought the walled garden into focus for Jeanine. She and Eric had adopted me as a friend rather easily, for I was readily adopted—an Englishman who had moved bag and baggage to the university in Colorado after a tour with the military in Korea. My wife was dead and Eric and I got on well enough together in the Engineering Department, although he was a bit ahead of me—which could, I suppose, be laid to the inherent anglophobia of American department heads.

It was probably their unvoiced decision to stay in that comfortable if undistinguished neighborhood that decided her—the certain

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knowledge that if she were ever to have such a garden, it would have to be here. And now.

"Too expensive, my dear," I had heard Eric reply indifferently on more than one occasion. Stonemasons *are* a rare and expensive breed, but the idea had taken hold. She confessed to me that she felt a deep need to fulfill this, to her, very modest dream. All her married life, she explained, her small brown eyes peering earnestly into mine, she had been a good housekeeper, a good cook, a good mother—and if not a good wife, then a comfortable one. Not too demanding, grateful for her share in her husband's life. But lately she had felt restless, and a little disappointed with her life as it was.

Eric, on the other hand, was at the zenith of his profession. His book on circuitry had at last been finished, published, and very well received. He was enjoying his most prestigious years. His grey hair was worn slightly long and he remained as thin as ever.

"Eric's a most attractive man," more than one of Jeanine's friends said to her almost like a warning. And Jeanine, a pretty woman but with the five pounds she had always meant to lose grown to ten and her own greying hair as unruly as ever, was made to feel vaguely uneasy by such remarks. Not that she knew what remedial steps, if any, she should take.

There were cautious looks and guarded remarks when she had told her friends of Eric's reappointment to the university at Mexico City for the summer session and that he had not insisted that she go. She had pointed out a little defensively that it would be for less than two and a half months—she had been down there with him last summer and she could always fly down later this summer. Not that Eric would have much time for her. Everyone knew what teaching summer school was like. Besides, I had said I might drive down with Eric. I had never been even as far south as Texas.

Since she would be alone much of the summer, then, she decided—because of the expense—that she would build the wall herself.

She began by checking out every book in the library on the building of stone walls.

At first Eric had been only mildly discouraging. "Are you sure you can lift all those rocks by yourself?"

Jeanine was a small woman, but she had been blessed with a fair amount of strength. "One at a time," she had answered firmly. "You set them in place one at a time. You don't have to lift all the stones at once . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So she began, under our bemused gaze, the careful survey of the area to be enclosed. It really comprised just the twelve feet or so of level lawn surrounding the patio, which was itself paved in stone. Beyond that the ground was no longer level but swept greenly away to where the swing set had stood.

I remember Eric rubbing his hand thoughtfully over his chin as we watched her stretch out string and pound in stakes with the small mallet she had bought at the hardware store next to the supermarket she had patronized for years. The weather was warm but the snow still streaked and muddied the ground.

"I just don't see why—now?" he repeated, more to himself than to her.

"Oh, because I've always wanted it," she said. "And it looks as if we'll be in this house forever—" She paused and straightened to look into his uneasy and perplexed eyes. "I imagine myself in some spring or another, on one of those soft evenings just when the sun has set, standing there in a long glittering evening dress, holding up a glass of wine to toast my lover."

"Lover?" He shot me a confused, embarrassed glance.

"That's you, darling. Besides, lifting rocks is as good a way as any to lose weight. You'll see." She panted a little between swinging the mallet briskly down on a stake. "I'll be a shadow of my former self."

Eric sighed and moved to the patio door. "I do wish you wouldn't run in and out so," he complained. "It's still early and already the house is full of flies."

The work went more quickly than I thought it would, but then I supposed she would soon tire of it and give it up. She had arranged with a local quarry to deliver river rocks—which were, as Eric predicted, very dear, but wonderfully multicolored and smooth. She mitigated their expense somewhat by using whatever rubbish she could find to form the bulk of the wall—bottles, cans, and the like—and then facing it with the stones. Soon most of the surrounding lawn was littered with stones, rubbish, and flat brown-paper bags of cement.

"They'll kill the grass," Eric observed darkly as we left together for yet another evening lab.

"It'll grow back," Jeanine said cheerfully, working diligently at the mortar to take advantage of what little daylight was left.

All that spring she worked. She read less, drank less, played less bridge. Forgot to vacuum.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She said she didn't notice more than a few pounds lost, but I thought her clothes fit her better. She said the strength she was gaining in her hands and arms more than compensated for the near permanent ruin of her manicure. The weather betrayed her only a little in April, with a spring snowfall early in the month.

Jeanine would arise with Eric in the morning and fix their breakfast, then I would come by and Eric and I would be off to the university. She confided to me that she could scarcely bring herself to clear away the breakfast things, she was so eager to be at the wall, mixing, filling, shaping, seeing it grow. She found a small but heavy ornate wooden door in an antique store which she pronounced perfect, and by the middle of May had framed it in place in the rear wall. She encountered great difficulty in hanging the door itself, but in the end she was satisfied with its appearance if not its functionality. She didn't think it would be opened much.

By this time we could no longer see the slope to where the swings had been. The rear wall was more than three-quarters done and its massiveness rather impressive. True, it had cracked in places where the ground had settled under the weight, but Jeanine said it gave it the right look of age without her having to wait too long.

She said she found herself constantly eyeing the walls and the stones yet to be put into place as she prepared their meals in the kitchen. The walls were raw in their newness, but she thought the vines would soften the harsh lines—sheltered by the house and the thick stone walls from the strong winds so common in our town, the vines should grow quickly. She hoped that by the end of the summer they would begin to cover the walls over. Wisteria, she thought. Wisteria grows quickly enough.

She had noticed and commented on Eric's growing sullenness when he was home, but she said later that she was quite unprepared when, in their bedroom the night before he was to leave for Mexico, he told her he wanted the walls pulled down. She could hardly believe what he was saying. He *couldn't* be serious!

He ticked off in his methodical way his resentments against her project and his voice rose in pitch as he came to what he felt was the clinching argument. "It's lowering our property value," he said angrily. "We're the laughingstock of the neighborhood. You know what they call this place? Split-level medieval. You're making us look ridiculous."

"You're jealous, aren't you?" she asked in her shock.

"Why shouldn't I be? It's all you do. You don't clean. Except for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

breakfast, when was the last time you really cooked? Or had people over? Or went anywhere?"

"Or was asked to?" Jeanine put her hands over her ears and ran out of the room and down the stairs.

His voice followed her relentlessly. "You're to start pulling it down before I leave here!" he shouted. "If you won't do it, I'll do it myself!"

She had so seldom crossed him in their marriage, she thought it was unfair that this once he wouldn't give way. She stood at the breakfast table, trembling with the injustice, looking out at the almost finished rear wall shining bone white in the moonlight with its dark and mysterious door.

She knew she had aroused and violated his male sense of possession. She was *his* wife. It was *his* house. He felt betrayed by her neglect and made ridiculous by its cause. His wife the stonemason. He wasn't proud of her strength, he was made uneasy by it. He was threatened by her exerting this measure of control over her own life.

She slid the glass doors open and breathed in the damp musty smell of the new mortar.

The grass was battered and brown near the foot of the wall. It would come back, she thought, but she would have to clear some space for the wisteria to root.

She bent and took up the trowel. It felt familiar and comforting in her hand. She always cleaned her tools after the work was done, and its blade shone brightly in the moonlight.

She didn't hear him come up behind her.

"I meant what I said!"

He pushed past her and gave the newly placed stones a brutal shove. They toppled and fell away, striking the earth with sad, muffled sounds. All the work she had done that day he was able to destroy in a few moments. Coming to the part that had set, he bruised his hands upon the unyielding mass and grunted. "I'll send some men out with hammers tomorrow," he said harshly. "Then we'll be rid of it."

It was more than a week later that the first calls from Mexico began. Although Eric was driving the station wagon down, he had prudently allowed more than sufficient time for the trip, and he should have been there for the meetings prior to the start of summer school. But he was not, and his colleagues were concerned.

Jeanine agreed he should have been in Mexico City by now.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There were many more calls. The Mexican police were contacted. The State Department became involved.

The station wagon was found with a broken axle abandoned eighty miles south of Ciudad Juarez in the desert. There was no trace of Eric or his belongings. Later his wristwatch turned up in a pawnshop in Mazatlan.

Throughout the summer, as Jeanine worked to complete the garden walls, reports filtered in. Eric had been seen as far west as Guadalajara and as far east as Cancun. There were seven such reports in the month of June alone. But their frequency gradually decreased over the summer.

The bodies were the worst.

Jeanine flew twice to Mexico City with one of her married sons, only to be quite unable to identify the pathetic bundles from the few personal effects found with them. She was able to refuse more such summons to fly down when Eric's dental records were sent on permanent loan to the Mexican authorities. It seemed clear that Eric had fallen victim to the violence which is not uncommon south of the border.

I stopped by the house toward the end of the summer. The garden walls were now complete and Jeanine was putting in the last of the wisteria. She explained how the vines would grow up rapidly over the stone without the need of twine or latticework.

I settled myself comfortably at the wrought-iron table and sipped the iced gin she had taken time from her work to prepare and watched her energetic hands patting the wisteria into place. She had grown thinner, I observed. I thought back over the first days of the summer to the visit I had had from an astonishingly buxom undergraduate student in electrical engineering—what was her name? Claire.

"Oh, Doctor Scarborough, it's just terrible." She had sobbed convincingly into one of my handkerchiefs shortly after Eric's disappearance had been picked up by the news media and was the talk of the campus.

I'm more naive than I should be for my years, I suppose, and boys will be boys, but I was appalled at Eric's taste.

"I can't believe it." She mopped at her eyes. The handkerchief seemed blanket-sized in the smallness of her hands. "I was supposed to go with Eric to Mexico. But he never called. I didn't know if he meant for me to fly down or what and I waited for him to call or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

write. But he never did. Then I saw the papers. I guess I'm lucky I didn't ride down with him."

I thought so, too, at the time and then put it, along with Eric's caddish behavior, out of my mind.

Watching Jeanine's strong brown hands settling in the wisteria, moving the dirt about briskly, I wondered if the police might not have considered that Jeanine herself might have driven the car as far as the border town of Ciudad Juarez with Eric's belongings in it and abandoned it there, rather than allow her husband to disappear from a college town where suspects would be few and motives more personal.

I sipped the gin and sighed. The police should have considered that one might take the bus back across the border. That would have been safest: a crowded bus to an airport somewhere in Texas and then a plane back to Colorado. There was a shuttle from Stapleton to one of the local motels, but how would she get from there to here without attracting notice? Not a taxi—no one but the elderly and infirm ever avail themselves of cab service in our town. That unquestionably would have drawn someone's attention.

She could have walked the mile or so back to the house. Our town is obsessed with youth and fitness. People walk and jog everywhere. And there would have been no luggage.

Or the police, had they investigated in more than a cursory way, might have had their suspicions concerning the time shortly after Eric left when Jeanine asked me to pick her up at the service station on Baseline Road, just half a block from that motel. She had taken the car in for some malfunction and needed a ride home. Since I had dragged myself off my sickbed to accommodate her, I wasn't to trouble myself about picking the car up since she thought her neighbor would be home by then and could take her back to fetch it.

"Had any more trouble with the car?" I asked. I suppose it was the gin.

Jeanine rocked back on her haunches and gave me a questioning look from beneath the floppy hat. Then she smiled and her teeth were marvelously white against the darkness of her tan.

"None, thanks. Why do you ask? That was months ago."

I shrugged, ashamed at her graciousness and suddenly grateful that the police had only unimaginatively looked south. "Something to say, I suppose."

"As if you had to resort to small talk. Silver-tongued Englishman that you are."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I smiled back at her. Her eyes were warm and had lost that haunted look that was so pronounced when she went off to Mexico on those gruesome errands.

I was around her a lot when fall came. I had finally shaken the bug I had acquired early in the summer and it had become comfortable again to stop by on my way home after classes. We sat on the patio and speculated after a few gins as to what might lie beyond that mysterious door set in the wall under the wisteria.

Eric had left her fairly well off, even without the insurance settlement we both realized would be a long time coming. Dead, Eric undoubtedly was, but proving it to the satisfaction of the insurance company in the face of so many conflicting reports was quite another matter. Only the passage of enough time would provide incontrovertible argument.

Jeanine gave a party late the following spring, mostly for old friends—but partly for me, I think, since it appeared likely that I would be inheriting the chair from old Simmons, who was about to step down at last.

The party was formal, which was unusual for our town and therefore much grumbled about—although good-naturedly, since I think if one owns a tuxedo or an evening gown one secretly welcomes an opportunity to wear it.

The weather cooperated beautifully and Jeanine left the doors open so that the guests could drift inside and out, into the walled garden. I arrived very early and, completely ignored by the ladies Jeanine had engaged to cater the affair, I made my way to the rear of the house. And there—across the dining area, beyond the hubbub of the kitchen—I saw in the garden the solitary figure of my hostess, dressed in a smooth, fitted gown the color of champagne, raise her wine glass in what was clearly a toast. She was turned slightly away from me, the wine flashing red in the fading light, her now slender figure silhouetted against the new green of the wisteria, beginning now to come into leaf.

It was a magic moment, perhaps the very moment that made all of her effort worthwhile. And she did indeed look to me like a heroine out of a romance there in her own special place.

Then she turned and, seeing me, joyfully beckoned me to join her with another lift of her glass.

It was soon after we returned from our honeymoon and I was lying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on the edge of sleep when I felt Jeanine roll up on her elbow, which was usually the precursor of a confidence.

"Darling, I must know something," she said softly.

"Yes?"

"You didn't kill him—Eric, I mean?"

I blinked at the darkened ceiling in surprise. "Me? Why on earth would I want to kill Eric? Why would you think that?"

"Oh, because you had talked about driving down with him, and Eric and I had quarreled and weren't speaking when he left, so I didn't know what the exact arrangements were. And he did stand between you and the chairmanship—and, well," she added shyly, "me."

She lay back, waiting.

It was my turn to roll up on my elbow.

"I did want the chair," I admitted. "But I wouldn't kill anyone for that. As for you—" I kissed her nose "—I don't think I ever really saw you until after Eric disappeared. Though I certainly should have."

I began to chuckle. "You're really a much more viable suspect, you know," I said gently.

"Me?" She seemed genuinely shocked.

"Well, yes. You might have done him in—for cause, mind you. He was a difficult man. You could have stuck him in that bloody wall of yours and driven the car to Mexico yourself."

"In the wall? What a grisly idea. That's what comes of being English. Anyway, my masonry skills wouldn't have been up to it. Under the wisteria maybe, but never in the wall."

I grinned at her in the dark. "Do you remember the night of the party last spring when I came upon you in the garden, toasting your lover?"

She began to laugh. "Oh, and you thought poor Eric was propped up across from me, nestled in cement. My darling Harry, that whole scene was staged for your benefit, to ensnare you. I thought I had never looked better, but that my arm was going to fall off if you didn't make yourself known soon."

"For me?" I was flattered. I pulled her into the crook of my arm.

"I'm sorry I had to ask you about Eric," she said. "It's just that I'm so happy I think I have to spoil it by looking for a fly in the ointment. How lovely that you thought it could be me and married me anyway.

"Sometimes I think Eric may have simply gone off on his own.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Deliberately. Just walked away from the job and his family and friends. People do sometimes."

"Chuck it all up? When he was so close to getting what he wanted in the department? He knew old Simmons was stepping down soon. —And took no money? That's an even sillier idea than one of us doing him in."

"It's not that silly," she protested mildly. "Eric was more of a romantic than you gave him credit for. He said something to me. On his last birthday he got into a crying jag after the party when there were just the two of us. He said he was grieving over his life. I tried to comfort him with all the wifely wisdom I could summon —pointing out how much he had accomplished, a poor boy from Nebraska rising to such prominence in his field—"

Yes, I thought, but not entirely on his own ideas. No, I wouldn't have killed him just for the chair.

"Do you know what he said? He said he wanted it all again. He wanted to do it all again. That that was the joy of living."

I fell silent, thinking, as I suppose she was, of Eric starting out with nothing in some remote part of Mexico or Central America, building a hydroelectric plant from scratch. Changing people's lives.

He could have done it, too. He had the energy and the skill. And to father babies with a young worshipful bride with more going for her than what's-her-name—Claire.

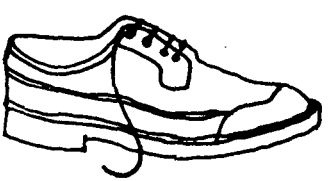
I sighed a little enviously at the innocence of Jeanine's romantic fantasy. Still, it was better for her to think of Eric drinking tequila in some shadowy cantina than lying as he was where I put him, in a shallow grave on the road to Mexico City.

She said she thought that maybe Eric, too, had longed for—and perhaps found—a secret place out of the way of the world, like her walled garden.

I knew better.

Or did I?

As the poet said, "The grave's a fine and private place."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

"This girl," Stally said, "this Lola whatever-her-name-is—"

"Lola Clay."

"She'd better not screw you up or she'll have Stally to deal with."

Corcoran raised a hand without looking for the grip he knew would be there. "Relax," he said. "Bad luck is always followed by good luck. I've had my bad luck . . ."

YOU NEVER KNOW YOUR LUCK

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Lola Clay had been hanging around The Man in the Moon for about a week, sipping half pints of dry cider and looking for somebody to commit a murder. She was ready to move on (perhaps Chelsea was fresh out of desperate men) when in he walked off the King's Road at noon on the Thursday. The pub owner began drawing the newcomer's beer without asking.

"Thanks, Ian," the man said, paying with a crumpled pound dragged from the pocket of a blue shirt soiled with sweat and dust.

"Where've you been keeping?"

"Wales. The lad's birthday. I'm lucky to have the price of a pint." As the man carried his drink away, Lola noted Ian's disapproval of the grotty clothes and boots. The rest of the clientele was a mixture of business people and tourists. This had to be somebody special, allowed in looking worn-out among the polished mirrors and mahogany. She took her empty glass to the bar, causing heads to swivel as she passed in suede and velvet.

© 1986 by William Bankier.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Strongbow?" As the publican drew it from the tap, he let his admiration show. She shifted the cascade of amber hair from one shoulder to the other and touched his hand when she paid him, wrecking his concentration at the cash register. When he came back with her change, she asked him,

"Who's the heavy geezer in the construction outfit?"

"Sorry. We have a rule about dress, but Ken's been around a long time. He wasn't always like this."

"I'm not making a complaint. I'm curious."

Ian went away to serve a couple of unemployed actors, faces vaguely familiar if you were addicted to the box, then he came back to Lola and said, "Ken Corcoran. He used to teach school. That was before he started coming around here. He lived in South London at the time. He never told me this, but a mate of his named Stally comes in sometimes and goes on about his nonpaying houseguest. Apparently Corcoran hit a kid once, took him outside the classroom and landed him one. The English are big on corporal punishment—the birch, flogging—but we draw the line at sir putting his fist in the little bastard's face."

"So he was busted."

"The way Stally tells it, he quit. I think the kid's parents would have liked Ken to come around to the house and hammer the boy on a regular basis. So there was no complaint, officially. But he got a message out of it, his body was telling him something. Next time he'd be killing one of the provocative little swine."

Lola swigged her cider, feeling excited, feeling thirsty. "I heard him mention Wales."

"Where his wife is. Gone back home with their son. She left Ken when the violence got out of control. This happened two years ago."

"He sounds interesting."

Ian liked relationships to begin in his pub. It would never happen to him, but he had a vivid imagination. The actors had been joined by a couple of photographers and they needed service. "You could probably handle Corcoran," Ian said as he moved away.

Space was available on the velour-covered bench beside him. Lola carried her drink in that direction, paused, glanced both ways, then let her gaze widen on Corcoran, giving him full focus. "May I?"

"Feel free."

She sat erect, facing him, playing it as if she had known him for years. He was sullen enough to be her husband. Under the coating of dust, his face looked good—open features, dark hair, russet skin,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

green eyes surprisingly pale. They tried to stare each other down, he belligerent, she amused. Nobody won.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I had no right to shoot your dog."

He grinned at that, a burst of sunshine through the murk.

"My name is Lola. Lola Clay. You're Ken Corcoran."

"So that's what you were on about with Ian."

"I can't help it. I've been sitting here for hours looking at all these poofs. It was such a relief when a man walked in."

"You're too young to talk dirty."

"I'm twenty," she defended herself.

He began to laugh. "I was going to say twenty-four."

"I'm not offended." One of her tricks was to take a mouthful of drink and then to smile as she swallowed it, slowly. "How was Wales?"

He reacted, beginning to emerge from wherever he had been hiding himself. He took a handkerchief from his back pocket, wiped the palms of his hands, and drew it across his mouth. She thought he would have folded it and tucked it into a napkin ring if there had been one on the table.

"Sorry, I overheard you mention Wales. Then Ian filled in about the school. And your wife."

"I'm not offended." He drained his glass. "Finish that, I'll get you another."

He moved away gracefully, leaving a faint whiff of brick-dust and sweat which reacted on Lola like a good omen. She snapped open her giant handbag, glanced inside, saw the money was there in the wrinkled envelope. The barrel of the gun was visible beneath the money. She was crazy, she knew, to be wandering around with so much cash on her and the illegal weapon, but she was afraid to leave either at home in case her father found it. Or the maid. Besides, when and if she got lucky—and today could be the day—she might have to do business in a hurry.

"Who's the swinger?" Corcoran asked Ian, who kept his head turned and his voice down.

"Been coming in for a week or so. She doesn't seem to work. Stays on the cider and never gets drunk."

Corcoran showed the publican an arrogant face as he lifted the glasses with bruised hands. "Well," he said, "you never know your luck in a big city."

He brought the drinks to the table, and as she drank she watched

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him. She didn't want to lose him. She was sure he would turn out to be the one. "So what happens now? You have to go back to work?"

He made an assessment over the rim of the tilted glass, eye to eye. "Not necessarily."

"What does that mean?"

"It means I have a trick back. If it seizes up on me—well, you can't shift bricks with a trick back."

"You can't do a lot of things with a trick back."

"We," he said, "would not have anything to worry about."

He took her back to his place—Stally's place, actually. It was a bit of a liberty. Stally would be irritated if he came in and found them in bed. Their friendship went back to the growing years in Sheffield, but Stally could be prudish. Mainly it happened if Corcoran's promiscuity impinged upon the older man's understanding of what their friendship was about. In Stally's view, they were brothers, drinking partners, snooker players, occasional patrons of the Royal Court Theatre for a left-wing play. There was nothing bent about their relationship—at least not in Corcoran's mind—but Stally had one girl friend and saw her no more then ten times a year, and he would have been happy if his friend Corcoran could limit himself to that degree of fraternization with the enemy.

"When does your friend get home?" she asked afterward. His lovemaking had been vigorous enough to disturb her.

"Never before seven. Do you want to leave?"

"I'd like to talk."

"I'll get us something to drink."

There was no cider, so she said yes to lager. The mattress on the floor, a venetian blind throwing daylight upward onto the stained ceiling, a whiff of mildew—she was only twenty but she felt as if she had been in a hundred places like this. Her dread to end all dreads was of ending up married in a small apartment with kids to look after.

"I'm glad I've met you, Ken."

"Wait a week and see if you still say that."

"Go on—you're terrific."

"I'm bad luck. You should take off while you've got the chance."

"Just because your wife decided to split?"

"Not only her." He pondered Mavis down in Cardiff. "She might have come to a bad end if she'd stayed around me. No, I was thinking of Annette." He swallowed beer and his ankle crossed hers, main-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

taining possession. "Annette Brockhurst," he said. "She was from Atlanta. She came here with her husband to buy antiques and ship them back for sale at triple the price. I ran into her just after I moved up here to live off of Stally. Brockhurst was getting ready to go home but she wanted to stay."

"You had nothing to do with that."

"No," he agreed, "it was mutual. He had a girl in Atlanta."

"So everybody was happy." Lola glanced into Corcoran's eyes. They were glass, he was gone. The mouth was down—small boy betrayed. "What happened?" she asked.

"We used to spend a lot of time at her place in Queen's Elm Lane. Stally disapproved, but at least I wasn't freeloading off him. Annette loved to dance—not the showoff stuff some women do, pretending they're on television. She wanted to be held to music—something dreamy on the record player. She had these old discs, one of them, Glenn Miller I think—'Blue Rain'—"

"She was older than you?"

"Yeah. But they're all the same in the dark, eh?"

"Bastard."

He went on remembering. "It was no different from any other time. We were dancing and she suddenly pushed me away and said, 'Just a minute.' I looked at her. 'Just wait a second,' she said. I felt scared—she'd never been like this. And then she began taking these deep breaths, gasping, as if she couldn't get enough air, and I yelled. I said, 'Annette!' and she said, 'What's happening to me? What's happening to me?' I started to cry. I said, 'I don't know, I don't know.' "

"Good God."

"Her heart was quitting. I dialed 999 and the ambulance came in fifteen minutes. They took her down the stairs and her face was grey. She was going. Oh, sweet Jesus—"

Lola hitched herself up and put her arms around Corcoran. "Baby, it's all right, baby." It was like comforting a tree.

"She died before they reached the hospital. Brockhurst paid to have the body flown home to Atlanta. Gone. All over before I knew what was happening."

He got up and went to the loo. When he came back, his mood was truculent, so Lola jettisoned her sympathy.

Getting back down beside her, he showed her the brutish face for a moment, then let it break into an appealing grin. "Okay, lady,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he said, putting his hands on her in a way she didn't entirely appreciate, "are you ready to die?"

"The least you could do," Stally said, whipping the sheets off his mattress, "would be to take the lady on your own bed."

"On that stingy little cot? Come on, I hardly know the girl. How could I ask her to climb up there on top of me?" Corcoran was laughing openly at his friend's discomfiture.

Stally began to see the funny side of it. He made a bundle of the linen and dropped it near the front door. Then he went into the kitchen and stood beside Corcoran, who was stirring a pot. "That smells terrific."

"You don't *know* how good this is going to be. Beans, wieners, brown sugar, worcestershire sauce, mustard, onions, cheese—"

"Did you leave any beer?"

"Brought in six large tins."

"What about bread?"

"Half a loaf of crusty white in the bin."

"We've died and gone to heaven."

Corcoran hesitated in his stirring, turned his head, and caught his old friend's eye. "Not quite yet, old mate."

After supper, Stally suggested a few frames of snooker at the academy. Corcoran shook his head. "I promised Lola I'd meet her in Covent Garden."

"Are you serious about this woman?"

"She's a kid. But she has a job for me to do—good money. She's already paid me a deposit." The urge to open up was running away with him, so he put on the brakes. He had assured Lola he'd tell nobody about the deal, and of course it made sense to keep it between the two of them. But she couldn't know how close he'd been to Stally for most of his life. Stally could come across Corcoran crucifying a pensioner and he'd disapprove, he'd try to make him stop, but he'd never turn him in.

"Does this mean an end to hod-carrying on the builder's site? Will you be able to afford your own flat?"

"Almost certainly."

"There's a relief."

"Can't happen too soon for me."

"Blessed peace, no more snoring in the night." Stally got up and took his plate and glass to the kitchen. "You sound like a bloody water buffalo sometimes."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I know when I'm not wanted."

"I hate freeloaders." Stally came back and stood behind his friend's chair. The table back in Sheffield had been covered with oilcloth, which, when new, gave off a pungent smell. Corcoran had spent more time in their house than his own. He hadn't changed much—apart from a couple of sizes up, the square shoulders and rough-cut head were the same. Stally's mother used to clear the table, rig up the crooked net, and beat them both at ping-pong. "This girl, this Lola whatever-her-name is—"

"Lola Clay."

"She'd better not screw you up or she'll have Stally to deal with."

Corcoran raised a hand without looking for the grip he knew would be there. "Relax," he said. "Bad luck is always followed by good luck. I've had my bad luck."

"You've had a dose of it," Stally agreed. "But what if there's just that little bit more to come?"

Corcoran placed the gun Lola had given him and the envelope containing one thousand pounds inside his old briefcase. Carrying it reminded him of his time teaching school. He got aboard a Number 11 bus at the Beaufort Street stop and rode down to the Strand. There, he dismounted and walked on into Covent Garden, where warehouses and market stalls had been converted to restaurants, bars, and boutiques. He headed toward his rendezvous with Lola outside the Underground station on Longacre, passing through an area where street entertainers were at work. He stopped and watched.

It seemed to Corcoran that the easy way would always prevail. Here they were again, kids with a bit of talent, a year's training. And what were they doing with it? They had painted their faces silver, dressed up in jumpsuits, and to the taped sounds of a synthesizer they were moving like robots—lift the arm, turn the wrist, jerk the head, let it vibrate a little. What bothered Corcoran was not that it was so easy to do but that the performers seemed so satisfied with themselves. Maybe the public was at fault for standing as if in adoration. And he was one of them. Why couldn't he find the courage to scream, "Your majesty, you are naked!"

Lola came to meet him through a horde of tourists. It was eight o'clock and the summer evening was filling up the street with dark-blue light. She approached with such confidence he decided this must be her turf. Her kiss surprised him—the wrist at the back of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his neck, the brushing of her lips across his with a shock like static electricity. Corcoran was, deep inside, a prude like Stally. Girls might accept invitations to men's beds in the afternoon, but only a tart would volunteer a kiss in a public place. Where did she think she was, Paris?

"What's the matter?" she asked him.

"Nothing."

"You look funny. Have you changed your mind?"

"Why should I?"

"You didn't tell anybody?"

"Do I look crazy?"

She couldn't have said exactly how she thought he looked, but there was too much in the pot for her to fold now. "You're not crazy, Ken," she said. "But you look manic. This has to be done calmly."

"How can you be calm after what that bastard did to you?"

Corcoran walked with Lola along Floral Street to a doorway near the corner of Bow. She produced a key, let them in, and led him up three flights of narrow stairs to a door ruined with too many coats of grey enamel. Another key and they were inside. It was nice enough but nothing special. A bedroom, a kitchenette, a small loo, a sitting room. "This is my father's pied-a-terre. A place for him to stay if he can't get home to New Malden. He's coming here later tonight."

Corcoran sensed his exposure for the first time. His breath flowed out audibly and he sat down, resting the briefcase against his leg.

"Do you need a drink?"

"Yes."

"Forget it. I'm not starting with glasses and stuff." She went about the room and began opening drawers, turning out the contents, knocking things off shelves.

"You're really doing this," he said.

"*We're* doing it." Lola was sure she knew how to handle Corcoran now. "Do you want to chicken out? Want to give me back the money and the gun and run off home to your boyfriend?"

He said nothing, concentrated on pulling a scab off his knuckle. It was too fresh. He put the wound to his lips and sucked blood.

Lola came and sat with her thigh against him. She got a taste of the blood when she kissed him, then moved only an inch away, the fall of her hair enclosing them like two kids playing under a willow. "He's crazy, Ken. My own father. Everybody knows him as Maxwell Clay, the successful real-estate agent—ten offices, his sign on homes for sale all over Southwest 20. But all the time I was growing up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he was putting his hands on me. I never told anybody—certainly not my mother. I can't tell you what things he made me do."

Corcoran shook his head, could not meet her eyes.

"Then last year, when my mother was dying of cancer, she told me one afternoon at the hospital. Unfinished business, she said, and she was looking at me this funny way, her eyes full of tears. I'm adopted. Not their child at all."

Corcoran had heard it all that afternoon in Stally's bed. He disliked the story then and now he was being forced to listen to it again. It was his own fault for seeming to be reluctant—she was trying to pump him up. "It's all right," he said, "I'm going to kill him."

"He was foster-father Max all the time," Lola went on, enthralled by her own misery, "so it was never incest—merely child molestation. I might have learned to forgive him that, but 'mother' told me something else before she died. She said my true mother is living somewhere in Canada—probably in Montreal. Detectives can do a job on this, tracing a mother. But it costs money."

"You'll get your money, kid."

"I will and all." She sat away from him, persuaded he meant to go ahead. "He refused me point blank. 'Forget it,' he said. He can afford it, he's worth a million. 'But not a penny for any wild-goose chase,' he said. Well, I intend to have it all. The lot. And you, Mr. Corcoran, for services rendered—" she stroked his thigh "—will receive forty-nine thousand to go with the grand I've given you."

Fifty thousand pounds would do a lot for Ken Corcoran's peace of mind. He could roll on back to Sheffield and buy a good house for half that amount. With the balance, he could take on a small shop, a news agent's—a bit of status, work only the hours he wanted to. Get in a young girl to help. At the pub on the corner, everybody would know his name. Young Brian would come up from Wales for the holidays, see his father in a better light. You never could tell—Mavis might even decide to apologize and come home where she belonged.

"When do I get the rest of the money?"

"Steady on," she said. "Let's do the job first. Then I'll have to get control of the assets. It shouldn't take too long."

"It better not." She was not, he thought, above stiffing him for the balance once he had killed her father.

Waiting alone in the dark was the worst part. Corcoran believed he could do the shooting—it was nobody he knew and the monster

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had it coming. The plan was so simple, it was perfect. The place had been ransacked by Lola, so he was going to come off as a robber interrupted in the execution of a break-in. She had taken a screwdriver from her handbag and used it to make marks on the doorframe around the lock. Then she had gone, telling him her father was due, according to what she knew about his plans, in about an hour.

The gun worried him slightly. For one thing, he had not fired it, so it was an unknown quantity. He supposed it would work. He had never seen a silencer close up but it looked all right. Lola said she had bought the weapon from an acquaintance who had gone off to India and would be more likely to end up in an Asian prison than ever to be seen again in London.

Footsteps on the stairs! He must have been dreaming—he hadn't heard the street door open. Corcoran stood and placed himself where he could see the entrance. There were no lights on in the apartment but his eyes were accustomed to the dark, he could see grey outlines. A key rattled against the lock, penetrated, turned, and the door swung inward.

The man coming in was bulky, he filled the frame. Corcoran's stomach tightened. He was on the other one's territory, he would have to kill to survive. He raised his arm, aimed, and squeezed the trigger. The gun popped and the man fell back against the wall. "Lola?" he said. He sagged sideways.

If Maxwell Clay lived, Corcoran told himself, there would be no estate, no payday. He went and stood astride the body on the floor, good grey suit, white cuff surrounding a wrist that twitched. He aimed straight down at the side of the head and the gun popped again.

Slipping the weapon inside his briefcase, Corcoran fled, leaving the door open, the body in view of anyone who might come up here. He was a sneak thief, caught in the act, panicked into committing murder, gone forever with nothing to connect him to the crime.

He went to a callbox and telephoned the number Lola had scribbled on a scrap of paper. The plan was for him to let her know her father was dead. They would meet, have a drink, and decide how to dispose of the murder weapon. He had an idea the best thing would be to drop it from the middle of Chelsea Bridge into the deepest part of the river after midnight when traffic was sparse.

The number he dialed produced an odd tone. He tried again—same thing. He dialed 100 and the operator had a go, and told him there was no longer any service at that number. Corcoran was left squint-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing at Lola's scrappy numerals, wondering if he was reading them wrong. The only thing to do was to go back to Stally's, wait until tomorrow, and meet her at The Man in the Moon.

Stally kicked the end of the cot and limped away. "What's happening to you, Ken? You used to be fun."

"What time is it?"

"You come in here last night smashed out of your mind. I've gone to bed, you can't even talk. Fooling around here in the afternoon instead of working. Where are you getting your money?"

"Is that the right time? Bugger off, Stally."

"Have you found another Annette? Maybe she'll set you up in a flat of your own."

"Aren't you going to work?"

"Some of us have to."

Corcoran dozed until opening time, then got dressed and wandered around to the pub. Ian glanced approvingly at the clean outfit he was wearing, the Sunday jeans, the denim jacket, the shiny shoes he used to wear when he taught school. Feeling successful, though anxious, he had put in one gold earring.

"No work today?" the publican said.

"Taking some time off."

"Nice if you can afford it." Ian raised a golden pint to let the sunlight pour through it.

Corcoran drank alone, sitting on the bench where Lola had been placed when he met her. Midday came and the lunch crowd poured in with no sign of his backer. She could have her hands full, he reassurred himself, losing her father, dealing with the police. Damn her, though, for not making sure the phone number was okay.

He was idly staring when his eye absorbed the headline on a tabloid newspaper being read at the next table—COVENT GARDEN MURDER. When the punter finished checking the racing form, he set his paper aside and Corcoran asked if he could borrow it.

"Keep it," the man said. "I've decided where I'm losing my money today."

The main story was covered in a few paragraphs. Corcoran read through it but the information wasn't what he expected to see. An intruder had been surprised in a third-floor flat in Floral Street, clearly a robbery in progress. The victim, a Mr. Raymond Felson, had been shot twice at close range. The owner of the flat, Mr. Maxwell Clay, estate agent of New Malden, told police and reporters

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that Mr. Felson was an employee of his and a personal friend. They shared a love of opera. Felson had been given a key and was free to visit the flat whenever he attended a performance at the nearby opera house.

Corcoran was shattered. He had killed the wrong man! How could they possibly go ahead with the plan now? An attack on Clay would be like lightning striking twice in the same place—the police would never buy it. Where the hell was Lola? They had to talk about this. How could she pay him? The balance of the money was to come from the estate. But there would be no estate, Clay was still alive. It was a classic screwup—he should have known better than to go along. But she was so determined. And she had put a thousand pounds in his hand.

In his shirt pocket was the scrap of paper with the useless telephone number on it. Desperate, he went to the pay phone beside the space-invaders machine and dialed again. Still the "no service" tone. Corcoran got another beer and went to his seat, raging inside, wondering why he was so bothered. He still had most of the money he had been paid, so he was better off than he had been for a long time. If he never saw Lola Clay again, wouldn't that be for the best?

The realization that he had killed an innocent man was a long time coming. But he took the blow now. Clay was one thing—he had messed with his adopted daughter, refused to help her locate her true mother. Corcoran hated bullies. But this Felson character was an opera lover, probably a family man—

When the pub closed, Corcoran went walking. He wandered into the Farmer's Market and, having eaten nothing, took a capuccino and a danish at one of the iron tables in the sun beside the tall mechanical clock with its steam whistle and the weighted chain swinging ominously. Then he went where instinct led him—up through Belgravia, past rows of grand houses, until he emerged into the space and traffic of Hyde Park Corner.

An hour had passed. It was four o'clock. His subconscious mind had been working and he knew what he was going to do. He couldn't stand back and wait for Lola to mess him about any further. He had to speak to her and there was only one way to find her.

Corcoran located a set of telephone directories at a kiosk in the Underground station. He found the head-office listing for Maxwell Clay Ltd., dialed the number, spoke to the man's secretary, and managed to convince her that he must have a word with the boss.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He isn't here, but he'll be in our Wimbledon office around closing time. I can't give you an appointment—it's been a terrible day—but if you'd like to go there on spec—"

Corcoran bought a ticket and rode the District Line to Wimbledon. The town center had changed in the years since he had been south of the river. The old two-story fronts opposite the station were gone, replaced by a futuristic structure in maroon brick and mirror glass with growing trees on the first-floor terrace. The Clay office was a block away at the foot of the hill leading up to the village. He went inside, glad he had put on decent clothes today. He looked unusual but respectable, and he moved like a man with over nine hundred pounds in his pocket.

A familiar-looking man was leaving as Corcoran spoke to the girl behind the desk. "Oh, Mr. Clay, this gentleman—"

Clay approached and Corcoran absorbed the shock. The face was Lola's—same broad forehead, same generous mouth—even the amber hair, thick and brushed to a sheen. Not her father? Adopted child? The bitch had lied through her teeth.

"If I could have five minutes, sir." Corcoran used a tone of voice that had gone down well with the deputy headmaster. "I realize it's an imposition, but I've come down from Chelsea especially to see you and it's rather important to me."

"Of course. Come inside." Clay led the way back into his private office. "Mr. Corcoran, you say?" He looked with curiosity at this powerfully built man with the gold ring in his ear. "What can I do for you?"

Corcoran went on improvising. "Sir, you may not appreciate this, but I have no other way to go. I must locate your daughter." He knew he must give Clay as much truth as possible. He sensed the older man would respond to straight dealing. "We met in a pub a few days ago and I'm—well, not to put too fine a point on it, I've fallen in love with her. And I don't know how to contact her. It's that simple, I just want to speak with her."

"My boy, you've come at a bad time." Clay looked genuinely sympathetic. "Lola's fiancé died last night—he was shot by an intruder."

Corcoran tried to take it in stride. Her fiancé? Lola was emerging as the devious woman of all time. It couldn't have been a coincidence that the victim was her sweetheart. She had set Felson up, and she had conned Corcoran into killing him. "Was that the thing in Covent Garden? I saw something in the paper—"

"Yes. In my apartment. A terrible loss—Raymond and Lola be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

came engaged last winter. Didn't she indicate anything to you about that?"

"Mr. Clay, it's entirely my fault. Your daughter gave me no encouragement. It's a one-way street. But now you tell me this, I feel even more strongly that I must speak to her."

"I'm not sure it's a good idea."

"I thought of finding out your home address and going at it that way, but sneaking around is not my style. And I'm not ashamed of my feelings."

"Of course not. But there's so much on my mind. Raymond was an important member of my business team as well as a prospective son-in-law."

Somebody tapped on the door and flung it open. Lola walked in. "Daddy, if you're ready to go, could we—?" She saw Corcoran and pulled up, smiling uncertainly.

"Forgive me," Corcoran said. "I had to see you again. I've told your father I love you. I've also told him you've given me no encouragement."

Clay got up, went to his daughter, and put an arm around her shoulder. "Are you all right? You look tired. Have you eaten anything?"

"I was going to call you, Ken," she said.

"I couldn't wait."

Clay looked at his watch. "I have to be at the flat in an hour. The police want me to describe what, if anything, is missing. Do you want to come?"

"Daddy, I can't go there."

"I shouldn't have asked you."

Corcoran got off his chair. "Can I buy you supper, Lola?"

"That makes sense," Clay said as he led them into the outer office. "I may not be home tonight, dear. I might decide to stay in town."

She chose The Alexandra. While Corcoran got drinks, Lola collected a couple of salads from the food counter and they tucked themselves away in a corner of the back room. Placing himself where she would have to climb over him to get out, he said, "Okay, talk."

"Why didn't you ring me? I waited all day."

"That number is rubbish and you know it."

"You must have read it wrong."

He took out the scrap of paper and showed it to her. "Write it down properly, then. I'll try it and see what happens."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm not there now, am I?" She crumpled the paper and threw it away. "Why didn't you look before you shot him? Couldn't you see?"

"I'd never met your father."

"Raymond is practically my age. Couldn't you see that?"

He ate and drank for a minute or so. She was nervous, sitting erect, very conscious of other people in the room. Corcoran said to her, "Lola, let's cut it out. This was a setup. Everything you told me was a lie, about being adopted, wanting to find your true mother in Canada. That man I met tonight is your father. You look so much like him it isn't true."

"All right."

"All right. Now for some reason you wanted this Felson character dead. Okay?"

"Okay."

"And whatever the reason, you didn't think it was enough to persuade me to kill him. So you invented this nasty foster-father nobody could like."

"Raymond was just as bad. They're all manipulators. I don't want to be somebody's property." As Lola opened up, confidence flowed back into her. "It was all right when we were dating. I didn't even mind being engaged to him, I never really intended to go all the way. Then I got pregnant."

"Are you now?"

"A little over two months. Ray was delighted, he wanted to get married straightaway. It was all I could do to keep him from running to my father and telling him."

"I think I understand."

"I wanted an abortion. Don't look at me like that, Corcoran."

"I'm not."

"You're all the same. *You* don't have to have the babies, you just walk around looking smug, passing out the cigars. See what I have created in my own image."

Corcoran said, "You can abort one of mine any time you so desire."

"Daddy's worse than Raymond. He won't tolerate termination of pregnancy for any reason, probably not even if it was certain I would die in childbirth. Did I tell you we're Catholic? He serves on committees against the pill. Once Raymond opened up to him, that would have been it. I'd be married by now and shopping for a pram."

"But having him killed. Couldn't you go away someplace and lose it?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Ray would have told Daddy. I'd have been out on my ear without a penny. Forever."

"So this is about money."

"Isn't everything?"

They finished their drinks and Lola insisted on going to the bar for another round. Corcoran kept her in sight, but she wasn't interested, apparently, in doing a flit. When she came back, he said, "What about the rest of my pay?"

"I was wondering when you'd get around to that."

"I murdered this bloke on your instructions. I never did such a thing before."

"You were never asked before."

"It was supposed to be fifty grand. I've been given one."

"Ken," she said, "are you thick or something? There was never fifty thousand. When Daddy passes on, I'll be well off but that could be twenty years. A thousand was all the money I have in the world." She let his eyes meet hers. "I may be able to find another five hundred."

He sensed she was messing him about. She looked smug, sitting there with Felson's seed germinating inside her, having got rid of the man and knowing she would soon dump that tiny remnant of him.

"I still have the gun," he said in a tone that left her in no doubt as to what he might do.

"You aren't silly enough to go to the police. You'd go in for life, whatever happened to me." She took his hand in both of hers and leaned closer so he could not avoid absorbing the full weight of her sincerity. Her handclasp was sharp and cold. "Please believe this, Ken. I'm not bluffing. There is a sealed letter in the possession of my solicitor. I gave it to him today in case something happened like what is happening now. It describes the plan to kill Raymond and it names you. If anything happens to me, the lawyer will open it and read it. And goodbye, Kenny Corcoran." She let go of him, sat up, and took a drink. "You'd better hope I don't get killed by accident."

"I don't believe the letter," he said.

"Are you willing to take the chance?"

There was a uniformed policeman standing outside the door of Clay's address in Floral Street. Corcoran told him he'd come to see Maxwell Clay and the officer led him up the winding stairway.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Clay was surprised to see him but seemed pleased. "Corcoran. Come in, we're almost finished."

"It's something about me and Lola."

"Sit down. I'll be with you in a minute."

The detective wasn't happy that nothing had been taken by the intruder. Valuable objects could be traced and a fence might have been persuaded to talk, but in this case there was nothing to go on.

When the policemen had left the apartment, Clay turned to Corcoran, who was sitting where he had waited last night with the gun in his hand instead of in the briefcase where it rested now at his feet. "Sir, I must talk to you," Corcoran said. "I wasn't completely honest this afternoon."

Clay sat down, interested. "Oh?"

"It's true that I love your daughter. But I led you to believe we met only recently and that she has no feeling for me."

Clay smiled faintly. "I sensed there was more between you."

"I've known Lola for several months. We fell in love not suddenly but gradually. Now there's no going back as far as I'm concerned. I came to you because Lola cut me off. She wasn't available where I used to telephone her. She stopped coming to our meeting place. I had to see her."

"The course of true love. I understand what you're going through. Lola's mother, God rest her soul, led me a merry chase when I was courting her."

"But the matter is one of some urgency, sir. I hesitate to say this to you—"

Clay stopped smiling. "I am not naive. I realize times have changed."

"Quite simply, Lola is pregnant. And I'm not sorry. I'm delighted. I've been asking her for weeks to marry me."

"*That's* why she was stalling Felson."

"I want Lola and I want our baby. But Lola—"

"Spit it out."

"She seems frightened. By what, the experience of childbirth? The responsibility? She wants to terminate the pregnancy."

"No way!" The businessman stood up and tried walking in one direction after another in the tiny room. "She will not!"

"I'm glad you agree with me. To me, human life is sacred. The very idea of abortion, even at the earliest stage, makes me feel ill, quite literally."

"Take it easy." Clay found a bottle of whisky and two glasses in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a cupboard. He poured stiff shots and passed one to Corcoran, who was now standing. They drank facing each other. "There will be no abortion. What there will be is a wedding." He looked into Corcoran's eyes. "Does that make you feel ill?"

"That's all I want, sir."

"Let me talk to her, then. I take it she knows where to get in touch with you."

She was waiting when Corcoran entered The Man in the Moon just before midday. He pointed an identifying finger at her as he passed on to get a drink from Ian, and Lola responded by raising her glass and giving him a honey smile across the rim. "You foul bastard," she murmured as he sat down. "You've ruined everything."

"No, I've straightened things out. For myself."

"He thinks we're getting married!"

"How's your drink?"

"If I go for the abortion now, he won't wear it. You don't know him. I'll never be allowed back—I'll get nothing, no money, noplace to live, *nothing!*" Her final word caused Ian to look up from his taps and then glance away.

"What you have to do," Corcoran confided, "is get me some more money. Shut up and listen. I don't care how. Steal something from the house and sell it. Pay me and I'll vanish."

"Get stuffed!"

"You're worried about what happens to you. Fair enough. I've given it some thought. Tell Dad the Clay family is well rid of this useless liar, Corcoran. Then go ahead and have your baby, Felson's baby, and put it out for adoption. Dad won't mind as long as it gets a good Catholic upbringing. Then you'll be free—we'll all be free."

"Some plan."

"Have you got a better one?"

"No."

Relief welled up in Corcoran. He had been afraid she might give him a hard time. "Who knows, you may even end up liking the kid. You may want to keep it." There was one more hurdle to get over. "By the way, don't think I've forgotten the sealed confession with your lawyer. Anything might happen—you might die in childbirth." He enjoyed telling her that.

"I'm not that lucky," she said.

"So what we'll do," he informed her, "is finish up our drinks and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then go to his office where you will collect said envelope and turn it over to me."

"Promise me one thing," Lola said. "Can you guarantee I'll never see you again after that?"

"No." His delight overflowed. "I expect the two of us will be meeting up eventually in hell."

Stally watched Corcoran falling about the kitchen, dropping things on the floor. "What's going on?"

"Making omelette. Can't make omelette 'thout breaking eggs."

"You give a whole new meaning to the phrase 'obnoxious drunk.' "

"Got more money coming. Take y'out, buy 'spensive dinner."

"I don't like that, either—you and your unexpected wealth."

Stally went into the other room where Corcoran's briefcase was resting open with a torn brown envelope protruding from it. He stared down at it, saw the wad of twenty-pound notes sticking out of the envelope. Squatting, not touching the briefcase, he peered into it like a motorist inspecting the corpse of the animal he has just run over, and saw the barrel of a gun and a white envelope with the typewritten instruction "To be opened in the event of my death" and a signature—Lola Clay.

The envelope had been ripped open, its single-page contents partially stuffed back inside. Stally withdrew the page, unfolded it, and began reading. "I want the police to know about this. The murder of Raymond Felson which took place in my father's flat in Floral Street was arranged by me. To have it done, I paid a thousand pounds to a man named Ken Corcoran who lives at—"

Corcoran spoke from the doorway. "What are you up to, Stally?" He sounded sober.

"This is true, isn't it?"

"What are you going to do?"

"I haven't had time to think." Stally considered things. "I suppose I'll have to tell the police."

Corcoran moved further into the room. "Did you see the gun in there?"

"I'm looking at it right now," Stally said.

"So there's only one question left," Corcoran said. "Which one of us is going to shoot the other?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE JURY BOX
by ALLEN J. HUBIN

As you may have observed, private eyes are by pervasive convention not happily married, usually not married at all. The convention further has it that they are male and have female friends, usually of the no-commitment, live-in variety. With all this conventionality, the form might be thought tiresome. But still it flourishes.

Witness the second case for Loren Swift, the only private investigator in Charlottesville, Virginia. This is *Hardball* by Doug Hornig (Scribners, $13.95), good, satisfying stuff. Swift—divorced, sleeping with a foxy lady—fits the convention. Here he's staging a midlife crisis, looking for a career change while mostly sitting on his fanny. Then his good friend, the county sheriff, asks his help. It seems a political opponent, thirsting after the sheriff's job, is waging a tough, well funded campaign which has of late turned menacing. Who's financing the opponent? Loren asks around, and the menace turns his way, striking very close to home.

Linda Barnes's agreeable actor/private eye Michael Spraggue also fits the mold. He returns in *Cities of the Dead* (St. Martin's, $14.95). Spraggue's home ground is Boston, but here he's in New Orleans at the request of his aunt, who's accused of the murder of a chef. The dead man, rendered thus at an awards banquet for famous chefs, had a poisonous personality and a murky past. Into which, at some peril, Spraggue pokes. Well done.

The convention extends to England, to Mark Savage, Laurence Payne's London-based private eye, who returns in *Vienna Blood* (Doubleday, $12.95). Here he's called to Vienna by his great aunt, an aged lady once an opera star, once and perhaps still a diamond smuggler. She's also the widow of a Jew who disappeared into Hitler's ovens, a woman in poor health who carries a gun and goes about in fear of her life. Aunt Alicia wants Mark's help: somewhere close about is a viper—or several. Savage would rather be elsewhere, but Alicia has no one else to help her. This tale is a bit harder to swallow than other of Savage's adventures, but Payne tells his story smoothly and the result is quite pleasant.

Lawrence Block has done six books about Matthew Scudder, including *When the Sacred Ginmill Closes* (Arbor House, $16.95). Scudder is a former cop; he turned in his papers when his bullet brought down a bystanding girl. *Ginmill* is set in 1975, when Scudder was one of the sodden night people, crawling from one sleazy Manhattan watering hole to another, living out of a dirty bottle, doing a little unlicensed private-eyeing for his acquaintances, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

infrequently sending some money to his ex-wife to help support their sons. Scudder fits, too. His is a grim and bleak existence, not brightened by the several cases for which he seems to have acquired some responsibility. A pair of rash thieves holds up an Irish after-hours bar; the owners have IRA connections and post bounty. A telephone salesman has his house robbed and his wife murdered; the cops think the salesman arranged it. Scudder's favorite ginmill has its second—and accurate—set of books stolen and held for ransom. Nothing pretty about any of this, but Block makes of it a compelling slice of life in the dead lane.

Loren D. Estleman's sixth about Detroit private shamus Amos Walker is *Every Brilliant Eye* (Houghton Mifflin, $15.95). Walker fits the pattern perfectly: a loner and single (once married), getting his sex cheaply, eternally broke, adept at survival in the urban jungle. Here a buddy, a reporter whose testimony is wanted by a grand jury, disappears. Walker is hired to find him by his newspaper, but others are also interested: one wants to give him money for a book manuscript, others a bullet for knowing too much about the wrong things. This is gritty fiction, very well told, very difficult not to read at a single sitting.

Boston private eye John Francis Cuddy fits, too, but not quite so routinely. His wife Beth died of cancer at age thirty, and her memory is very real and dear to him: he visits her grave to update her and pledge his love every so often, and he has difficulty involving himself with other women. He's tough and scarred from his profession: he kills when he has to and doesn't mourn the necessity. His second case, *The Staked Goat* (Harper & Row, $14.95) by law professor Jeremiah Healy, has high suspense, good plotting, and strong characters (but what are we supposed to do with Cuddy's piously "justified" homicide?). An old Vietnam acquaintance of Cuddy's comes to town, makes a cryptic phone call, and gets himself murdered. Meanwhile, Cuddy's capture of an arsonist-killer exposes him to the wrath of the killer's brother, a low-life of equal venom. The buddy's death is the more complex matter, and Healy blends the two cases expertly.

Private eyes and others, all good storytelling in *The Year's Best Mystery and Suspense Stories 1985* (Walker, $15.95), edited as usual by Edward D. Hoch. Fourteen stories, eight from this magazine, by the finest authors writing these days in our shorter form. By folks like Lawrence Block, with an Edgar-winner which Block then expanded into his latest Matthew Scudder novel (see earlier). And Stephen Greenleaf, with the first short story about private eye John Marshall Tanner, a compelling portrait of love and deadly peril. Add a prize winner by Reginald Hill, an impossible crime yarn by Hoch, a memorable vignette of Dublin by Clark Howard, the last story about Abe Levin, a New York detective, by Donald E. Westlake. And more. Read this.

© 1986 by Allen J. Hubin.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DETECTIVERSE

SPOILSPORT

by BETSY CENEDELLA

An especially picky grammarian
Remarked to his lending librarian:
"I simply forbid it!
It *must* be 'whodidit'—
'Whodunit' is strictly vulgarian!"

© 1986 by Betsy Cenedella.

"Q"

IDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT

by MARY E. DURHAM

An astronaut-turned-private eye
Decided a gumshoe should fly.
While solving a case,
He got stranded in space—
Now he's known as "P.I. in the sky."

© 1986 by Mary E. Durham.

"Q"

HARK, THAT'S NO LARK!

by CAROL CAIL

A genial fellow named Mark
Spends hours in the park after dark.
When the moon comes up round,
Quite a few folks have found
That his bite is much worse than his bark.

© 1986 by Carol Cail.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To 27 million Americans, this scene is a fairy tale.

Simply because they can't read. Functional illiteracy is a problem that now affects 1 out of 5 American adults.

You can change that by making a tax-deductible contribution to the Coalition for Literacy. Fill out the coupon or call us toll-free at **1-800-228-8813** and bill it directly to your credit card.

Volunteer Against Illiteracy. The only degree you need is a degree of caring.

Coalition for Literacy

Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution for:

☐ $10 ☐ $25 ☐ $50 ☐ $100 and above

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Phone _____

☐ MasterCard® ☐ Visa®

Credit Card # _____

Expir. Date _____

Signature _____

Make checks payable to:
COALITION FOR LITERACY/MPA FUND

Please return to: Coalition for Literacy
Magazine Publishers Association Fund
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60811

62

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Mahboob Chaudri story by

JOSH PACHTER

This twenty-seventh night of Ramadan was Lailat al Qadr, "The Night of Power," when the first teachings of the Holy Quran were revealed to the Prophet of Islam for the guidance of his followers.

"What a night to feel powerless," Abdulaziz Shaheen growled. "On this, the most powerful night of the year . . ."

THE NIGHT OF POWER

by JOSH PACHTER

The burning in his lungs was a hawk with sharpened claws and it tore at his flesh with cruel anger.

Ana aouz cigara, he thought, his throat parched, his breathing hoarse. I *must* have a cigarette!

But it was Ramadan, the month of Saum, and the Holy Quran commanded all able-bodied adult Muslims to "eat and drink until so much of the dawn appears that a white thread may be distinguished from a black, then keep the fast completely until night." The sick were temporarily exempt from fasting, as were nursing and pregnant women and travelers making long journeys, though they were all obliged to make up any of the thirty days they missed for such reasons as soon after the end of the month as they were able. Only the very young and the very old were fully excused from participation.

He had no reason not to fast, so he tasted no food in spite of his hunger, his cracked lips touched no water in spite of the heat of the day, and—worst of all—the packet of cigarettes in the pocket of his *thobe* remained unopened, and its cellophane wrapper crinkled in laughter at his suffering as he caressed it with longing fingers.

He looked out the plate-glass windows of the great Presidential

© 1986 by Josh Pachter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hotel, past the green-tiled roofs and golden central dome of the Guest Palace to the sea, where the sun's nether rim flamed but a centimeter above the slate-grey waters of Gudabiyah Bay. He watched without appreciation as the fireball extinguished itself in the Gulf and brilliant streaks of salmon and orange and brightest yellow washed across the ivory sky. He clenched his teeth and waited impatiently as darkness fell, and the *imams* peered solemnly at their white-and-black threads in the gathering dusk.

Then at last, at 8:07 P.M., the signal canon sounded. Almost instantly there was a cigarette between his lips and he was drawing its soothing smoke deep within himself, blessing the Almighty for having given him the strength to conduct himself faithfully throughout the day. Praise Allah, he thought, only three days more and I am free of this torture for another year!

When he had smoked his cigarette down to the filter, he stubbed it out in an ashtray and crossed the lobby to the doors of the Al-Wazmiyyah Coffee Shop. The room was already crowded, but he filled a plate with mezzah and ouzi and kofta kebabs from the Iftar buffet and found an empty table by the window. He ate slowly and sparingly and drank three glasses of cool spring water, then he left the restaurant and, after a brief stop to pick up the object he needed, rode the elevator to the fourth floor of the hotel.

The corridor was deserted—all the Presidential's guests but one, he felt certain, were downstairs at the buffet, even the Westerners, who had been cautioned not to eat in public during the daylight hours as a sign of respect to Ramadan and to the Muslims observing the fast. He walked quickly down the hallway to the fire door, let himself through it, and climbed the last two flights of stairs to the hotel's top floor.

Here, too, there was no one to be seen, no one to see him as he crept along the thick brown carpeting to the door marked 613.

He put his left ear and the fingertips of his right hand to the wood and listened intently. There was nothing to be heard from within. His hand darted into the pocket of his *thobe*—not for his cigarettes this time but for the ring of keys, which he clasped tightly in his fist to keep them from jangling as he drew them forth. He selected one key from the dozen on the ring and fitted it soundlessly into the lock set into the doorknob. He held his breath as he turned the key, turned the knob, and swung the door inward just enough to allow himself to slip through the opening and ease it shut behind him.

The room was dark, illuminated only by the faint glow of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hotel's exterior lighting that filtered in through the drapery covering the single window.

He waited. The only noises in the room were the gentle hum of the air-conditioner and the deafening pounding of his heart. When his eyes had adjusted to the almost-blackness, he was able to make out the shape in the left-hand bed, imagined he could actually see the one thin blanket rising and falling with the breathing of the figure who lay there asleep.

He stole across the room to the side of the bed and reached once more into his *thobe*'s deep side pocket.

When his hand reappeared, he was holding neither cigarettes nor keys.

He was holding a small black revolver which glittered evilly in the diffused light admitted by the curtains, and his hand was steady as he touched it to the temple of the sleeping man in the bed.

Mahboob Chaudri's temples throbbed and his pulse raced with exasperation as he stood looking down at the dead man. "Where in the name of the Prophet is his *clothing?*" he demanded of no one, though there were four other people in the room to hear him. There were angrier words in Chaudri's mind, but he was able to bite them back before they escaped his lips. Fasting is only one half of faith, he reminded himself. During the month of Saum, hostile behavior was also to be avoided—as were lying, backbiting, slander, the swearing of false oaths, and the glance of passion. So it was written, and—a devout believer—so Mahboob Chaudri would comport himself, the better to avoid distraction from the pious attention to God which was the meaning of Ramadan. It was not easy for him to calm his thoughts, but he held them inside his mouth with the tip of his index finger as he returned his gaze to the bed.

The dead man was completely naked, covered only by a light blanket of a blue several shades paler than his eyes. He was a Westerner, a Caucasian, but his skin was richly tanned. He had close-cropped blonde hair, a fine Roman nose, and what Jennifer Blake under happier circumstances would have called a dishy moustache. There was a small black hole just above his left temple and the blood that drenched his pillow was still damp.

The Pakistani turned away in disgust. In spite of the air-conditioning, he was hot and sticky in his olive-green Public Security uniform. There was a line of perspiration on his upper lip. "Where are his trousers?" he exclaimed, fighting to keep his voice below a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shout. "His shirt? His shoes and stockings? Where is his billfold? Where are his papers?"

"The murderer—" Abdulaziz Shaheen began, but Chaudri cut him off.

"Yes, yes, of course. The murderer has taken everything away with him, including the gun and the keys they used to let themselves into this room."

"But, *why?*" said Jennifer Blake, a willowy brunette in a trim gold-and-white suit with a nametag on one lapel that identified her as the hotel's night receptionist.

"So that we would not be able to determine the victim's identity, of course." Chaudri had been called away from his Iftar meal at the Juffair police barracks to investigate a report of a gunshot at the Presidential Hotel, and he was tired and hungry after a long day of fasting.

"That's not what I meant." The Blake woman frowned, her cultured British tone beginning to broaden under the strain of the evening's events. "It's bloody well obvious that's why his kit was taken off, excuse my French. What I meant was, why was he here?"

"Yes," said Mirza Hussain from a straight-backed chair by the low couch where the receptionist, Shaheen, and an elderly woman bundled up in a terrycloth bathrobe were all sitting. "That is exactly what I have been asking myself all along. Why was this man sleeping in room six-thirteen in the first place? Why, for that matter, was he in here at all?"

"He was not a guest of the hotel?" asked Chaudri.

"*I* never checked him in," Jennifer Blake said firmly. "Not tonight nor any other night."

"Mr. Hussain? Mr. Shaheen?"

Although the Presidential was part of a large American chain, it was—like all major hotels in the emirate—run by Bahrainis and staffed by a mixture of British expatriates, Indians, and Pakistanis. Mirza Hussain was general manager, Abdulaziz Shaheen chief of security. Both men were native Bahrainis, both now wore the traditional Arabic long white *thobes* and red-and-white-checkered *ghutras*, but there the resemblance between them ended. Hussain was built along the lines of the country's ruler, Sheikh Isa bin Sulman al-Khalifa; he was small in height but rather portly, with golden skin, a greying moustache and chin-beard, and wise black eyes behind the glittering lenses of a pair of spectacles with thin golden

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rims. Shaheen was muscularly built and cleanshaven and olive-complected, a decade younger and a full head taller than his superior.

"I have never seen him before," said Hussain with an uncomfortable glance at the lifeless figure on the bed. "Perhaps Miss Ramsey or Miss Messenger checked him in during one of the other shifts."

The security chief shook his head. "I don't think he was a guest," he said, and paused to draw deeply on the cigarette held between the thumb and index finger of his right hand. When he spoke again, wisps of smoke puffed from his mouth along with his words. "But of course I can't be certain. It should be easy enough to find out."

"You yourself do not recognize him?" Chaudri persisted.

"No. I have no idea who he was. But whether he was a guest here or not, he had no business in this particular room, that much is certain."

"And why is that?"

It was Mirza Hussain who answered. "Standard hotel practice, *mahsool*. Sometimes important visitors drop in on us unexpectedly. We must always have space available to accommodate them. So no matter how fully booked up we may be, we keep this one room vacant in case of an emergency. It is never rented out in the ordinary way."

Chaudri made an irritated grimace and turned back to the dead man in the bed. "Then what were you doing here sleeping?" he muttered. "What is it you were doing in room six-thirteen, where you ought not to have been at all, asleep so early on a Ramadan evening? And who is it who shot you, by all that is holy? Why were you here, and why were you killed, and by whom?" He curled his nut-brown hands into fists and rubbed wearily at his eyes. "All right," he sighed, "let us begin at the beginning. Frau Jurkeit?"

The older woman in the bathrobe stirred restlessly on the green-leather sofa. "I am in ze room next door," she said, her English heavily accented. "Room six-eleven. I am here in Manama wiss ze trade delegation from Bonn. We were to meet in ze coffee zhop downstairs for dinner at eight-thirty but I twisted my ankle as I was dressing and decided to dine alone in my room. I ordered a—how do you say it?—a cutlet from room service." She glared disapprovingly at Mirza Hussain. "It was undercooked. Tomorrow I shall recommend zat we try ze Hilton instead. Just after nine o'clock I heard ze shot from zis room."

Chaudri took a pad from the pocket of his uniform jacket and made a note. "And what did you do then?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I called down to ze desk and reported what I had heard to, I assume, zis young woman."

"You did not look out into the corridor?"

"Certainly not!"

"Ah, yes," Chaudri remembered. "Your ankle."

"*Mein Gott*, it had nuzzing to do wiss my ankle! Someone is shooting a gun, do you sink I am sticking my head outside for a better look?"

"No, no," he said quickly. "Of course not. Miss Blake?"

The receptionist brushed a stray lock of hair into place and took up the story. "It was three past nine when I spoke with Frau Jurkeit, I checked the time as I hung up the phone. I immediately rang Mr. Shaheen's office, but he wasn't there at the moment. Then I tried Mr. Hussain, but he didn't pick up, either. So I did what I ought to have done straightaway, I expect—"

"You rang up the Manama Directorate," Chaudri completed the woman's sentence for her. "And the officer you spoke with reported to the Investigation Officer, and the Investigation Officer sent for me. And by the time I arrived here at the hotel you had located Mr. Shaheen and Mr. Hussain, and you gentlemen had already come up to this room and let yourselves in, and discovered—"

He let his voice trail away and indicated the body in the bed with a wave of his hand. He worked his jaw thoughtfully from side to side and went on. "And discovered a naked man in a room where he ought never to have been, shot to death by an unknown assailant who then took all the victim's clothing and other belongings away with him when he left."

"It seems incredible," said Abdulaziz Shaheen. "What will you do now, *mahsool?*"

The Pakistani clapped his hands together decisively. "Now," he said, "I will begin to earn the salary which the Public Security Force is so generously paying me."

It was almost midnight and Mahboob Chaudri was alone in the room with Abdulaziz Shaheen. Mirza Hussain had gone down to his second-floor office, where he had promised to keep himself available in case his further presence should be required. Jennifer Blake was back at her post. In a few moments she would be relieved by Gillian Messenger, who would be on duty at the reception desk until 8:00 A.M. Frau Jurkeit had long since returned to her own room next door. Even the body of the murder victim was gone.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Much had happened during the last two hours. Two and three at a time, the Presidential Hotel's entire night staff and those members of the daytime and graveyard shifts the security chief had been able to reach by phone had paraded in and out of room 613 for a look at the dead man. Yousif Albaharna, the daytime doorman, thought he might have seen him entering the hotel that afternoon, but all Westerners looked more or less alike to him, he admitted sadly, and he could not be sure. No one else could remember ever having seen the man before, and both Gillian Messenger and Leslie Ramsey were certain they had not checked him in as a guest.

The Forensic Medical Officer had arrived shortly after eleven, had examined the body, had confirmed that death had resulted from a single shot to the head from a small-caliber weapon, had grudgingly agreed that the victim had most probably been asleep at the time the shot was fired, had stood around impatiently while the final groups of hotel employees filed past the corpse, and then at last had instructed two uniformed *natoors* to carry it away on a stretcher. He would perform an autopsy in the morning, he announced, and then he was off.

Mahboob Chaudri had been kept almost continuously busy. He had interrogated the staff. He had conferred with the F.M.O. He had supervised the activities of the team of photographers and fingerprint men sent out by the Criminal Investigations Division. He had gone down to the lobby and verified that both of the keys to room 613 were present in the room's mail slot on the wall behind the reception counter where they belonged. There were several sets of passkeys available to the maids, and the manager and security chief each had a set of his own, of course, but these, too, he had been able to account for. It seemed improbable that the dead man and his murderer had entered the room together. A more likely explanation of the sequence of events was that the victim had let himself in, either with a skeleton key or by springing the lock with a strip of celluloid, and had then undressed and gone to sleep. The murderer had followed sometime later on, had committed his crime and gone away with the dead man's belongings, unaware that there was anyone next door to hear the fatal gunshot and report it.

Thus far Mahboob Chaudri had proceeded with his investigation and with his thinking, and now he sat with Abdulaziz Shaheen and sipped gratefully at the strong Arabic coffee which Mirza Hussain had sent up for their refreshment. There was a bowl of fresh dates

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

next to the fluted *qraishieh* on the room-service dolly, and the fruit had happily dulled the edges of Chaudri's hunger.

The security chief lit a cigarette from the butt of his last one and slipped the almost-empty packet back into the pocket of his *thobe*. "If only we could put a *name* to the man," he grumbled. "If we knew who he was, that might tell us why he was here in the hotel, in this room. And if we knew why he was here, that might tell us why he was killed, and who it was who shot him."

"In the morning," said Chaudri, "we will circulate his photograph around the embassies, the banks, the Western companies, and hopefully someone will recognize him. But all that must wait for business hours. If only there was something else we could be doing *now*."

"What a night to feel powerless," Shaheen growled. "On this, the most powerful night of the year."

Mahboob Chaudri looked up from his thoughts. In the flurry of activity surrounding the murder he had forgotten that this twenty-seventh night of Ramadan was Lailat al Qadr, "The Night of Power," when the first teachings of the Holy Quran were revealed to the Prophet of Islam for the guidance of his followers.

" 'This night better than a thousand months,' " Chaudri quoted, " 'when angels and spirits descend to the Earth, and it is peace until the rising of the dawn.' " He got impatiently to his feet and began to pace the deep golden carpet, his hands clasped fitfully behind his back. "Well, for once the blessed Book is mistaken," he said. "There has been no peace for me this night, oh, dearie me, no. And there will *be* no peace for me, not until I locate the gun and identify the villain whose finger pulled its trigger, not even should all the angels and spirits in Heaven choose this very moment to begin their descent."

And at that very moment, Mahboob Chaudri ceased his restless pacing. "To begin their descent to Earth," he said slowly, staring down at the faint impression in the empty bed that showed him where the dead man had lain.

Then, to the amazement of Abdulaziz Shaheen, he grabbed up his peaked uniform cap from the nightstand between the two beds and dashed from the room without another word.

Milling crowds of men in long white *thobes* and women in veils and long black *abbas* thronged the Baniotbah Road as Chaudri wheeled his dusty Land Rover out of the Presidential Hotel's parking lot and headed north toward the Muharraq causeway. Andalus Park

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was filled with picnickers, and children splashed in the fountains as wide-awake and gleeful as if it were the middle of the afternoon rather than the middle of the night. But this was Ramadan, and Bahrain's Islamic population would celebrate with food and drink and gaiety till long after dark, then sleep for several hours and arise to celebrate again until Sahari, when the first light appeared in the east and the *muezzin*'s call to dawn prayer announced that it was time to resume their fasting with the ritual of Niyya, the renewal of intention.

The crowds thinned out as he swung across the Khawr al Qulayah waterway, then picked up once more when he reached Muharraq Island. He left the Land Rover in a No Parking zone at the entrance to the International Airport's main terminal building and welcomed the rush of cool air that greeted him as he stepped through the glass doors.

As always, the terminal was buzzing with activity. Day and night had no meaning here: Bahrain was a refueling point for flights connecting the Western world with the Far East and there was a constant ebb and flow of transit passengers whiling away the hours between legs of their journeys, in addition to the frequent takeoff and landing of planes beginning or terminating their runs in the emirate. As Chaudri paused in the teeming passenger hall to get his bearings, the information boards above his head showed the arrival of a Korean Airlines flight bringing construction workers from Seoul and the imminent departure of an Air France 727 returning bankers, corporate executives, and diplomats to Paris.

When he found the small glass-walled checkpoint he was looking for, a solicitous *natoor* listened to his request and handed him a thick bundle of white cards. He went through the stack carefully, and when he had examined them all he shuffled back to the middle of the pile and removed a single card. He read it again, and a third time, and then he put it in his pocket and returned the rest of the cards to the *natoor* and drove back into Manama to the Police Fort at Al Qalah, where he closed himself up in a tiny investigator's cubicle and placed a long-distance telephone call to a distant city where it was still late the previous afternoon.

"I appreciate your staying on so late," said Mahboob Chaudri, as they stepped off the elevator into the quietly tasteful lobby of the Presidential Hotel. "So early, I suppose I should be saying—it will be dawn in another few hours. Which way is it we are going?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"This way." Mirza Hussain led him past the entrance to the Al-Wazmiyyah Coffee Shop (still open, but practically deserted now), past the reception desk (where Gillian Messenger stood diligently at her post), and down a broad corridor lined with boutiques, a newsstand, a hairdresser, all dark and long since closed for the night. "I am responsible for whatever happens at this hotel," he said as they walked. "Never before has such a terrible thing taken place here. Naturally I stayed."

"It is almost over now," Chaudri told him reassuringly. They were at the end of the corridor, facing a heavy wooden door marked "Abdulaziz Shaheen, Chief of Security" in both Arabic and English.

Chaudri knocked loudly, then twisted the doorknob and walked in without waiting for a response. The Presidential's security chief was seated behind a cluttered desk, a half-smoked cigarette in his hand. He had apparently been reading through the contents of the file folder lying open on the desk before him, but he closed it at their entrance and pushed it casually off to one side. His dark face was drawn and tired, and there were shadows beneath his deep-set black eyes.

"Mr. Shaheen," said Chaudri, "we've come to talk with you about the murder."

Shaheen nodded silently and waved them to a pair of chairs. He put his cigarette to his lips and inhaled deeply.

"According to the stories of Frau Jurkeit and Miss Blake," Chaudri began, "the death shot was fired at approximately nine o'clock last evening. Now, of all the puzzling questions this crime presents, the question which has been interesting me the most is this one: why was this man in bed, probably asleep, at that rather early hour of the evening? The simplest answer would be that he was in bed because he was tired. But why was he tired? During Ramadan, both Arabs and nonbelievers keep late hours as a rule—and even were it *not* Ramadan, nine o'clock is rather early for a man of that age to be sleeping, isn't it?"

"Not necessarily." Mirza Hussain frowned. "If he had had a busy day, he might well have decided to go to sleep early. But why here in my hotel? He was not a guest. He had no business here. He most certainly had no business in room six-thirteen."

"Yes, yes," said Chaudri. "But still the question bothered me. Then, an hour ago, you said something which supplied a possible answer, Mr. Shaheen."

"About The Night of Power, you mean?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Indeed. You reminded me that tonight, the twenty-seventh night of Ramadan, is Lailat al Qadr, and it struck me that perhaps our victim had just recently descended to Earth, like the angels and spirits written of in the Holy Quran—not in a winged chariot from Heaven, no, but in a silver bird from some other time zone. Though it was only nine in the evening to us when he died, if he was a new arrival from, say, the United States or Canada, his inner clock would have insisted that it was, for him, the middle of the night. Perhaps that was why he was in bed when his murderer found him in room six-thirteen."

Abdulaziz Shaheen stubbed out his cigarette carefully and took a fresh packet from the top drawer of his desk. He left the drawer open, Chaudri noticed, stripped off the cellophane and peeled back the foil, and tapped the packet against his forefinger. "So you think he was a newcomer to Bahrain?" he asked as he flicked a thin gold lighter into flame.

"I know he was. When I left you in such a rush, I drove out to the airport and found the officer in charge of Customs and Immigration. He gave me all of the disembarkation cards filled out by the passengers who arrived in Bahrain yesterday afternoon. Those cards are containing quite a bit of information: name of the arriving passenger, home address, employer, reason for visit to the emirate, and so on. One of yesterday's cards caught my eye. It was made out in the name of Stephen Kimble, an American, and his employer was given as Presidential Hotels International, with an address in California, in the U.S.A."

Abdulaziz Shaheen breathed out a cloud of smoke that masked the expression on his face for a moment.

"I placed a phone call to the Presidential chain's Los Angeles headquarters," Chaudri went on. "It was still daytime there, and I was able to speak with a Mr. Deming, who recognized my description of our unfortunate corpse and identified him as a company executive named Stephen Kimble and told me exactly why Mr. Kimble had been sent to Bahrain."

It happened so swiftly that, had Mahboob Chaudri not been waiting for the movement, he would certainly have missed it. Abdulaziz Shaheen's hand darted into his opened desk drawer and came out holding a .25-caliber Browning automatic pistol. His dark face was cold and hard as he jumped up from his chair with the gun in his fist.

"I must insist that you keep both your hands in sight," he said,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his voice tight and strained. "I'm sorry, Mr. Hussain, but I really must insist."

Mirza Hussain sat very still, one hand in the pocket of his *thobe.* His eyes told a tale of infinite weariness and sorrow. At last, with a deep sigh, he took his hand from his pocket. He was holding a packet of cigarettes and a plastic lighter. He lit a cigarette for himself and held out the packet to Chaudri.

"No, no," the Pakistani shook his head. "I am not a smoker. It is, I think, an evil habit. But it does not seem to have interfered with your reflexes, Mr. Shaheen. I'm glad I stopped in to see you on my way up to the second floor and warned you of what to expect from this visit. Now, if you will give me your pistol I will hold it while you are seeing what else is to be found in Mr. Hussain's cavernous pockets."

"You are thinking of the murder weapon?" Hussain smiled grimly. "I don't have it here, gentlemen. Perhaps I should have brought it with me, after all. But it is back in my office, in my closet—in Stephen Kimble's suitcase."

"You were embezzling money from the hotel," said Chaudri flatly, when Abdulaziz Shaheen had confirmed that the manager's pockets were indeed empty, save for a ring of passkeys and a handkerchief.

"Yes. Never very much at a time. Always small amounts, small amounts. But over the last three years I have diverted almost fifty thousand dinars into my private account. I was very careful. I thought it would be impossible for anyone to discover what I had done. Apparently I was wrong."

"Embezzlement," remarked Mahboob Chaudri, "is also an evil habit. More evil than smoking, since it does harm not only to oneself but to others as well. But I am interrupting. Please forgive me and go on with what you were saying."

Hussain told his story matter-of-factly. There was nothing in his manner to indicate that he saw anything out of the ordinary in the events he was describing. "Kimble flew in yesterday afternoon," he said. "He took a taxi from the airport and came directly to my office without stopping at the reception desk. We spoke for a few moments only. He was exhausted from his journey, and I took him up to six-thirteen and let him in with my passkey. He did not tell me why he had come—we would talk further in the morning, he said—but I knew. The home office had found out about the missing money. He had come to investigate, and he was sure to learn that I was the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thief. If only I could have another few days, I thought, I could get my affairs in order and get out of the country before anyone was the wiser."

"So you killed him," said Abdulaziz Shaheen.

Hussain looked down at the glowing tip of his cigarette. "Yes. I waited until Iftar was well under way, when I could be certain that the sixth floor would be deserted, then I went upstairs and let myself back into the room. It was dark, he was sound asleep. I shot him. Then I gathered his belongings and put them in his suitcase with the gun and brought it down to my office."

"You realized that if we knew who he was," Chaudri suggested, "we would quickly learn the reason for his visit to Bahrain. And that would tell us it was you who had the only motive for killing him."

"I thought I was safe. Unless room six-thirteen is in use, the maids clean it only once a week. It would be days before the body was discovered, I felt certain, and by then I would be safely away. It never struck me that there might be anyone else on the sixth floor when I fired the shot. I never stopped to consider that you would be able to trace him through Customs and Immigration without his papers. I must have been mad. If I had thought of that, I would never have killed him. I would have dropped everything and fled."

Mahboob Chaudri got to his feet. "But criminals never think of everything," he said. "Not even wise men think of everything. Perhaps it is their remembering that fact which makes them wise."

"In another hour it will be Niyya," said Mirza Hussain, lighting a cigarette. "I'd better smoke now, while it is still permitted."

Chaudri marveled at the state of the man's mind, at the idea that he felt it acceptable to embezzle money during the month of Ramadan, felt it permissible to commit murder then or at any other time, but would be careful to avoid food, drink, and tobacco during the daylight hours as if he were truly a devout Muslim.

They were standing in the warm night air in front of the Presidential Hotel's main entrance, waiting for a Public Security van to come and take Hussain away. The streets were almost empty, the city was asleep. But shortly the Islamic population would begin to awaken, in time to enjoy another meal before the time of fasting began.

"Listen to me, *mahsool,*" said Mirza Hussain softly. "I have perhaps ten thousand dinars hidden away at my home. If we were to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

go there, you and I, I could give you half of that money and use the other half to make my escape. You could say that I broke away from you, that you chased after me but lost me in the darkness. No one would ever know the truth."

Chaudri did not respond.

"Five thousand dinars," the murderer continued. "That is a great deal of money, *mahsool*. It is, I imagine, more than your beautiful green uniform earns you in an entire year. Does my proposal not even tempt you?"

Chaudri considered the question. In fact, five thousand dinars was slightly more than he earned as a policeman in *two* years. It was enough to make the down payment on the bungalow in Jhang-Maghiana he was planning to build for Shazia and the children. It was enough to allow him to return to Pakistan much earlier than he had ever dreamed possible. *Was* he tempted? Was he resisting temptation now, or was his mind truly pure?

The answer came to him with the clarity of polished crystal.

"No," he said firmly, truthfully. "Your proposal is not tempting me, Mr. Hussain. It is not tempting me at all."

It was still quite dark, but soon the sky would begin to lighten. Soon it would be possible to distinguish a white thread from a black, soon the *muezzin* would call the faithful to the renewal of their fast, soon the Night of Power would draw to a close.

Mahboob Ahmed Chaudri took in a deep breath as he stood there before the great hotel with his prisoner at his side. He could feel the power enter his body, his lungs, his very being—the power of a thousand months. He raised his gaze to the heavens and offered up a silent prayer of thanksgiving and joy. As his lips formed the unspoken words, a shooting star arced across the sky and lost itself in the velvet infinity of the night.

A great sense of peace descended around him and into him, a peace Mahboob Chaudri knew would last until—no, *beyond*—the rising of the dawn.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A good supporting actor supplements the lead. Managing a business is much like directing in that the manager must know how to get the most from his employees. Donnie was a genius for blending theater and business to deal with management decisions. It was a matter of pushing limits.

EQMM "first story" author #636, John Higham, is a Pennsylvanian currently enrolled in a Master's Program in Psychology. His look into the mind of Donnie Cooledge's imagined play in almost two acts indicates he already has a high degree of mastery in psychology (ho ho ho) . . .

MANAGEMENT DECISION

by JOHN HIGHAM

How I killed the old man isn't important; a tie can become anyone's noose. Like other good murders, his was hidden within the night. I left only the right clues behind. A right clue is one that points the finger at the accused with such intensity that all other suspects will be ruled out, convicting before the trial and condemning before the sentencing.

I am not a fool for knowing that the best clues can be manufactured after the crime. It's like a play; the players must know their parts and be willing to be directed. Because the director knows the entire picture, his arrangements must be exact. He must be demanding of his players, forcing them to experience their roles. I went home after the deed, prepared for the opening of the show.

The April sun had not yet risen above the hills surrounding Mansfield when I arrived back at the store. From the Early American sofa in the front window, I watched traffic pass Mansfield's intersection. From the sofa, the entire town could be seen. Both store and town were quiet. Not much moved in this part of Pennsylvania this

© 1986 by John Higham.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

early in the day. Most of the traffic on Route 15 was from out of state.

Cooledge's Furniture Store hadn't relocated once in its one-hundred-and-twenty-year history. Phineas Cooledge owned tracts of forest in Tioga County in the 1860s. He became a lumber millionaire and lived on Millionaires' Row in Williamsport. It was his company that lumbered most of the county. He didn't supervise the cutting, instead sending his son, Bartholomew.

Ah, yes, but what has this to do with my killing of the old man? Pure inspiration for that act came from my great-great-great-grandfather, Bart. Yes, he was shrewd. He built Cooledge's General Store while the county was filled with lumberjacks; his was the company's store. He made enough to become a gambling ladies' man. Though deeply in debt, he managed to become popular by giving away goods as payment. Phineas never found out.

Bart lived well as he made friends in the county. He was a poor poker player who couldn't resist an invitation to play. He was an actor living onstage without being discovered. The publicity he gave the store helped it survive after the lumbering had finished. Yes, the actor within me identifies with Bart. He must have felt like a little boy excitedly rubbing his hands together while giving away cheaply made goods. Everyone who thought Bart was a hero was fooled; he simply knew how to make management decisions. A hero at the cash register.

The old man was no hero. He had no way to deal with people taking the hour-long drive to Elmira or Williamsport to buy furniture. He had no business sense, thinking that Ross and I could sell the furniture by sitting on the display closest to the picture window every morning. Twenty-five years old, and all he let me be was a mannequin and a laborer. The old man said I helped bring people into the store. Bunk—we were just fuel for cheap jokes. I would have quit long ago if Bart hadn't inspired me. He built this store when he was twenty. He had everything the old man lacked—imagination, talent, and willingness to experiment. The unexposed actor, his lifelong show won him acclaim across the county.

Ross arrived on time as usual. He was the star of the play. Having grown up with him made it easy for me to direct him. Ross and I went through school together, and he would've joined the Army when I went to Bloomsburg State had he not wrecked his car a week before reporting for duty. The accident broke most of his bones and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cracked open his skull. It changed him. Sheriff Hudson started having trouble with Ross. Once it took three deputies forty minutes to get a pair of handcuffs on him.

"Morning, Donnie," he said. He sat down in the recliner and looked out the window.

Go on, look out there, Ross, and enjoy it. I don't care if you're the best fighter in Tioga County, you're about to become one of its best actors, my friend. The thought of Ross standing on a stage made me laugh.

"What's with you?" He jabbed a toothpick between his teeth.

"Nothing, Ross." Act one, Scene one, action. "How much did you win last night?"

The camera waited for him to respond. The audience wasn't yet assembled, so this was just a rehearsal. The dress rehearsal. I imagined Ross, all muscle and power, standing onstage in a dress. Ross looked at me and smiled. A good director has patience. Some children passed the window, making good composition. Wave at the children, Ross. Good, the beast waving at the children.

Why don't you answer me? This scene needs your response. A good director is patient, Donnie.

"Well, I counted over a hundred dollars," he said.

Good, now wait until that sinks in, Donnie. Let him wait before you respond. I looked around the store. It is important that the director knows the stage, alert for the activity. More children walked past.

"A hundred dollars? Are you sure that's all you won?" We waved at the children. "Isn't gambling illegal?" He flinched. The trick with Ross was releasing his anger slowly, controlling the explosion. "No, wait, forget I said that—that's only if you win over two hundred." Don't blow up yet, Ross. Give me a controlled explosion.

Our hunting and fishing trips together had taught me how far to push him. When I cast him into the role a year ago, I knew he was perfect. I now looked at the group of managers' pictures on the wall and smiled at Bart. Isn't Ross perfect for the role? He'll be great for the audience, won't he? He even looks like a murderer. Everyone knows how angry Ross can get. And everyone knows how much he hates the old man. If only the supporting actor were here, Scene Two could start.

"You said it was legal last night, Donnie." His anger escalated as he glared at me. I felt the hate within him aimed at me. What energy, this outpouring. He's waiting for me to challenge him. That

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

could mean a fistfight. He's never hit me before. No, not now, Ross. Cool down. —But not too much. Mike, where are you? What kind of a supporting actor are you? Only you can help me build up Ross's anger to the explosion I need.

A good supporting actor supplements the lead. Managing a business is much like directing in that the manager must know how to get the most from his employees. I'm a genius for blending theater and business to deal with management decisions. It's a matter of pushing limits.

Scene one is taking too long. It has achieved the goal of setting the main character up for the conflict, but it needs to be intensified by the supporting actor. Ah, a noise. Here he comes.

Ross looked toward the back of the store. "It looks like the idiot is here," he said. Mike Banacheck thumped up the back stairs, his gait thundering as he moved closer to the old man's office on the second floor. Did I lock that door? Damn, did I lock that door? The whole play could end with Mike blowing it if that door isn't locked. The old man had the only key, and I made sure that was in his pocket. But did I lock the door?

Mike's knocking seemed to shake the building. "Sounds like Fatso can't get into the office. Dumb idiot, I'd like to—"

"Cool it, Ross. And don't let him know about the money or he'll go into another lecture on how to spend money." Ross smiled—he liked secrets like this. Mike thumped back across the floor and down the stairs. Beginning of Scene two. Thank you, Mike, for being predictable enough to include in my play. Bart, I know you'd be proud of how I made use of him. He's a valuable asset.

The lights hummed when Mike turned them on. He waddled among the rows of couches and chairs, occasionally stopping to adjust a piece. He was fat, his waist hanging over his pants, his chest stuffed into a button-down shirt. He never seemed to mind the weight, acting as if it were the most comfortable thing in the world to be overweight. His calmness was exactly what was needed to handle Ross. In fact, the two often balanced each other out. Ross would react to Mike, who would then react to Ross.

Oh, don't think me callous for not thinking about the old man lying dead upstairs. Justice demands that someone pay for that body—I agree with that. However, it is the superior person who can get others to pay for him. True, I didn't cry a tear over the old man. I'm saving my grief for a later time in the play when tears will be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

important. Death is a sad thing made more tolerable through mourning. Not mourning the death of a father is not sane, is it?

"Good morning," Mike said. It was his store for the next few hours and he didn't even know it. Ross nodded at me, smiling. It was time to pick up the pace. What happened next was going to be my toughest part. "Phew, it stinks up there," said Mike. "It smells like another squirrel died in the walls." He sat down at his desk. The smell—oh, damn. I hadn't even once considered it. "Donnie, you know where your dad is? He was supposed to be here early." No, Fatso, I don't know where my dad is. The odor. I forgot about the odor. "Did he say he might be late? He was supposed to be here when I got here. He said he had to see me about something." He probably wanted to give you a raise, Fatso. Just because you're the only non-Cooledge ever to be the Assistant Manager, you think you're so important.

"Mike, he never schedules any meetings, you know that."

Mike looked at me. "Well, he scheduled this one with me. I'm going to call him at home." Damn it, you're not going to ruin this play with improvisation, Fatso. Seize control, Donnie. You're the director here.

"Ross, go to the house and see if he's there." I said it before I thought about it.

Ross glared at me. "Who do you think you are?" he said, pointing at me with his index finger. "Huh? What makes you so great you can sit there and boss me around like that?" He got to his feet, towered above me. Yes, the explosion. It's early, but that's okay.

Mike rushed over between us. A few people walking past the window stopped.

"Stop it, Ross," Mike said. "Forget it. He doesn't know how to act." Slug him hard, Ross. Rebel in front of the world. Good—hit him again! "Calm down, Ross—" The Assistant Manager tried to block the fists that tore into him. The crowd was growing and I noticed someone running toward the Boro Hall. It was time for me to get into the fray.

"Damn it, Ross," I said, "people can see what's going on. It's not good—" Turn, Ross, and see. Get more angry, Ross. Pick up that table, *now*. Great!

The window shattered out onto the sidewalk. The audience, screaming, drew back into the street. Traffic stopped. Act two, Scene one began.

Ross held a large piece of glass in his hand, menacing the crowd. "I hate every one of you! Why don't you leave me alone?" I jumped

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on his back, my smallness creating nothing more than a temporary diversion. He grabbed me by the throat. Don't pass out, Donnie. Just kick around enough to keep the play going. I swung at him. He grabbed me in a bearhug from behind and pushed the glass against my neck. Let the terror come, Donnie. Let the town see the crazy brute hold you hostage. Let the sheriff see it.

Sheriff Hudson ran over from Boro Hall with one hand on his sidearm. He and the old man were good friends so I knew when he would be on duty. "Get back, give them room!" he yelled. Yes, move back so the sheriff can get a good look at this monster holding me. Mike moved on the floor. Limp away, Mike, you played your part very well. Let Ross and me carry the play now.

"Donnie—" the sheriff said. "Where's your dad?"

"Stay back, Ray, or I'll slice him open!" Ross, cool it—I want you to try for the sheriff, not me. "I'd hate to do that, but don't try me!" Don't back up, Sheriff, be brave—and hurry up!

"Look, Ross, I want to speak with Donnie's dad." You'll have a tough time doing that, Sheriff. Don't smile—act terrified! Look upward, Donnie. Make the sheriff go upstairs. Make him find the body. Make the final scene happen. Yeah, that's it—look like you think he might be upstairs.

"Hey, Frank, run upstairs to the office and get Don."

The deputy bounced up the back stairs while Mike insisted that the old man wasn't in yet. Just a few more minutes and I'd have the store. The deputy's boots clumped against the hardwood floor above. Repeated knocking on the office door was futile. He kicked the door.

Come on, find the old man, my throat hurts! The resolution needs to happen *now,* Sheriff. Ross needs to crack *now,* or he won't be convincing enough. A story must be true, or appear to be true, for the audience to accept it. If Ross cools down no one will believe he did it. He came to the store late last night, found my father working, they argued, he killed him, then took money. The motivation was greed, as evidenced by the hundred dollars he'll say I gave him. No one will believe I gave Ross a hundred dollars.

The joy a director feels at knowing that his successful illusion is being accepted is great. If I wasn't waiting for my cue to grieve the old man's death, I'd celebrate. Damn, the state police—with rifles and sirens. Don't kill Ross, you guys! He has to show us he murdered the old man.

Ross responded to the police by shoving the glass closer to my jugular. Keep cool. As long as I can resolve things later, the state

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

police are providing heightened audience awareness. I didn't count on them, like I didn't count on Mike arriving for work five minutes late. Next time allow for improvisation and minor on-the-spot changes, Donnie—but now look into the sheriff's eyes like a lost puppy. What's the deputy yelling about? Is it time for me to cry?

"Ray, the door's locked!" the deputy is calling from upstairs. Tell him to break it down, Ray. Your best friend is dead, Ray, and you have to tell him to take the fire ax and break down the door. This scene is taking too long! Mike, tell him to break down the door! No, Ross, I'm not moving. Don't worry, friend, you've given a splendid performance and you're about to get your reward.

Calm down, Donnie. The deputy wants to break it down, that's why he asked. But Frank's busy talking with a trooper. Wait, what if they decide to try to save me first? What should I do? That isn't supposed to happen. Get those sharpshooters off the roofs over there, guys—Ross won't hurt me. Keep very close to Ross, Donnie, otherwise they'll kill him and your play. A good director can only use what he's given to produce a believable work. I can't do a thing with those troopers—they've learned how to stall and wear everyone down—then blam, blam.

Hurry up, Frank. Younger, stronger guys should be deputies. "Sheriff, I really don't think he's up there," Mike said. A director needs to be in control of his actors. Kick that door in, Frank—smash it in *now*.

"We were going to meet this morning, Ray," Mike told the sheriff. "I don't know what he wanted to talk about, but—"

Shut up, Mike. Let the deputy find the body. Let the final scene begin. I hate offstage action—it only hints at what's taking place. If only the building was constructed so that everyone could watch Frank kick the old man's office door in. Still, offstage action can add an element of suspense. When Frank opens that door and sees the body on the floor, he'll holler as if he's seen a ten-point buck. By now most of the audience knows that room is important—that's where the body is. Those who don't know will be shocked, and Ross will crack. He won't need to say anything. Holding the dead man's son hostage is his guilty plea. By this afternoon, I'll have the new window on order and I'll be checking inventory.

Upstairs, the door resisted several stout kicks, then gave way. "Oh, my God," Frank yelled. The display room and the street went silent.

Tears, Donnie, tears. Look at the crowd. One, two, three, four,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

five, six crying. Seven, good. Eight. Cry with me, folks—this is your scene to participate. Yes, Sheriff, drop your head, good.

Mike approached cautiously. "Ross, let him go—he's your best friend." Get out of here, Mike. Let the guy hold me, let him show he's ruthless enough to kill for greed, that he hates my family. Let him write his sentence, Mike. You're not the director here, so get away. Don't distract him; the troopers will shoot him. They'll kill him, Mike. Damn you for messing up the scene—my big scene. Get out of here.

"Get back, Mike, he's going to kill me." Mike stopped when he heard me. Good, now stay away. God, think of it—you've got this guy convicted! Don't smile. You can't smile until everything's over, Donnie.

Ross moved, still holding me tightly. Mike started talking again. "Ross, let him go—the cops aren't going to hurt you. The guy just lost his father, Ross. Have some compassion for him. Remember how he visited you in the hospital when you had your accident?" All right, good idea, Mike, let the crowd know we're friends. Only a crazy man holds a friend hostage. Only a crazy man murders his boss.

Mike moved closer again. "Ross, he's your friend. Why don't you just forget it and let him go?" The audience remained still.

"You've got the wrong last name, Mike."

Good, shut him up, Ross. And let your anger flow, don't let go of me. Just don't kill me and don't let the cops shoot you.

The crowd began to murmur. Good. Look at this beast who killed an old man and now holds his son hostage. Listen to his anger. Put him away.

"He thought of both you guys as if you were his sons, Ross," the sheriff said. Good, try to calm the beast, Ray. Calm him down with your approach. You've known how to do that for years.

Mike, stop moving closer. Why can't you shut up? You're only causing problems. That's why I decided to get *rid* of you. I'll give you a week's paid vacation before I let you go, now shut up. This scene needs to end, and you're preventing that. I should have written this without you. I should've used someone else. The old man was always going to Troy and Wellsboro. It would've taken more time to set up and act out, but it would've been worth it.

"Stay where you are, Ray." Good threat, Ross, but it's time to let things end. The point is made and the scene is dragging.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Look, Mike, Don wanted you to be manager when he retired in April," Ray said. *What?*

Hold on, Donnie, maybe he means you—just be calm. No, he can't mean me. That old coot—I went away for four years to learn business and this is what he does to me! Damn, let go of me, Ross!

The crowd is watching me. Cool it, Donnie. "How'd you know that?" Mike asked. Shut up, just shut up! Get in control, Donnie, get back in control. A good director—

"He told me last night. He said he put it into his will."

Shut up, shut up, shut up! It's my store now that the old man is dead! I went through too much to have you ruin things, Ray. Respond, crowd, damn it, respond! Donnie, direct, don't act. Frank, go upstairs and get the murder victim. Ross, your part is to act like you did it. You're so violent everyone will believe that. Everyone knows you killed the old man. You did it because you get angry. Only this time you stole over a hundred dollars from the old man. Show them the money, Ross.

Ross killed him, Ray. You know how violent Ross is. He'll kill again if you don't lock him up. I know how to make you all believe he killed him. It's true, Sheriff, Ross killed the old man!

What, didn't you like the play? Bart would be proud of me, Sheriff, he really would—

The old man left me no choice—my last management decision involved canceling the show before the final scene ended. This allowed the audience to write its own ending. Neither they nor any of the twelve critics wrote an ending similar to mine. But a director is responsible for his failures.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions, including change of address, should be sent to P.O. Box 1930, Marion, Ohio 43305.

For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send your current mailing label with new address.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A *NEW* Lang and Lovell story by

ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

It has been too long since we've had a story about outside-man Lang and inside-man Lovell, called by Ellery Queen "two of the sharpest, shrewdest, most engaging con men now operating in the art world . . ."

THE BELLMAN PORTRAIT

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

The big man with the battered face and hulking shoulders barely constrained by the tight-fitting suit looked slightly ill-at-ease, as if he would have been more at home in a fight ring than an expensive near-north art gallery. So would his smaller fox-faced companion—but only on the other side of the ropes, angling for the fast bucks earned by somebody else's blood and sweat. There was nothing ill-at-ease about him, though—and, to show it, he flashed me a quick, false smile as I came in from my office at the back.

"Nice place you got here, Harry," he said.

"I like it," I said. "Am I supposed to know you?"

Fox-face continued to grin and shook his head. "Not particularly," he said. "But we have what you might call an acquaintance in common. Frank Douglas. You remember Frank, of course."

"Sure," I said. Like I'd remember an attack of measles or a broken leg. "Has his health improved any since that Senate committee was trying to subpoena him?"

He laughed. "You can ask him yourself. He's got a little party planned up at his place this weekend. He wants you to come. You and your partner both."

"And if we can't make it?"

The big man moved then, a shambling lurch to the right that

© 1986 by Robert Edward Eckels.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brought him into contact with a small table and set the vase on it teetering dangerously. Fox-face moved swiftly to steady it.

"Careful there, you big ox!" He gave me another example of his insincere grin. "You got to watch this guy every minute," he said. "He's a regular walking disaster-zone even when he isn't trying to be. Now what was that you were saying?"

"Does Frank always send you two around to deliver his invitations?" I said.

Fox-face continued to grin. "Only when he wants to be sure the message really gets across. Friday night. Around seven, he said. Don't forget."

"I'll make a note of it."

"Yeah, you do that." Fox-face turned then and went out, followed by the lumbering man, who managed to make it out the front door without bumping into anything else.

Lovell stood beside his easel in the skylighted room he used as a studio, shifting uneasily from foot to foot. "What if we just didn't go?" he suggested.

"Then I imagine our two friends would come back and turn this place into a shambles on purpose. Even if they didn't, it would only postpone the inevitable. Frank wants something and we're going to have to find out what it is, and better sooner than later."

Lovell wrung his hands together. "Why did we ever get involved with him in the first place?"

The answer to that wasn't simple. Lovell has been my partner for a number of years now. He's as nervous as the proverbial long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs and an absolute nut about his health and the kind of food he'll let himself eat. But he has one great redeeming quality. He can forge paintings of any style, period, or school and do it so well that only an expert scientific or spectrographic examination can tell them from the real thing. That talent of his coupled with my flair for what you might call "salesmanship" is what earned us the money to set up this gallery.

The idea, of course, was that once we had it, we'd go legitimate. But things don't always work out quite the way they're planned. There were times when money was short, and others when opportunities came up that were just too good to miss. Lovell's involvement with the Bellman restoration was one of the latter—or seemed at the time.

Bellman is a story in itself. Shortly after the Civil War, an en-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terprising young businessman named Harvey Bellman set up a factory on the prairie south of the city to manufacture rolling stock for the then booming railroad industry. He was close to the materials he needed, but in order to attract workers he had to provide housing. Company towns were nothing new, but Bellman was smart enough to realize that the better the housing, the better the worker he'd draw, so instead of setting up an instant slum he called in a team of architects to design a model community, with churches, a business district, even a hotel and a community center for dances and Chautauqua-type lectures. I don't know what his fellow industrialists thought—probably that he was a lunatic—but any number of international sanitary and architectural organizations showered awards on Bellman for what in fact was a showplace, and when John Barlow Singer painted his portrait he hung it proudly in the hotel lobby.

The problem was that while Bellman was ahead of his time in some respects he wasn't in others, and so when hard times hit toward the end of the century, it seemed to him it was just good business to cut wages. It wasn't good business to cut rents, though—so he didn't. The result was rioting and a long bloody strike, during which the painting disappeared—a loss that was felt heavily by art lovers because it was the only Singer portrait for which no copy existed.

Eventually, of course, the strike ended, but things were never the same. Bellman died. The city grew south, swallowing up the town, which became just another blue-collar neighborhood sliding into a slum. But then, two or three wars later, it was "rediscovered," like Georgetown in Washington, and suddenly it became fashionable to own a house in Bellman and restore it. Lovell joined in, primarily to provide his artistic energies an outlet. But when a stack of old paintings was found in a long-sealed storage room in the old hotel basement, the opportunity was just too good to pass up.

Like most do-gooders, the restoration-project director was only too willing to let himself be persuaded that the end justified the means, and for a half share in the profits to be ploughed back into the project he agreed to support our claim that one of those found was indeed the lost Singer. It was no big deal for Lovell to paint the portrait using known photos of Bellman as a guide, then age it and dirty it up the way it would have been if it had in fact lain neglected in a basement for eighty-odd years. The problem was that since it wasn't exactly clear who really owned the painting—the Bellman family or the city as successor to the town but definitely not us—we couldn't sell it openly. I made a couple of tentative approaches to potential

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

buyers with no success. And then one day, without warning, Frank Douglas approached me.

Frank was an ex-mobster—or as ex as you can be once you've mixed with the organization—but not an ordinary one. He'd gone into crime from college the way other grads had gone into law or banking, as a promising field in which to carve out a successful career. And now that he had, he was determined to live the life of the cultured gentleman of leisure he'd always considered himself to be. There were those uncharitable enough to suggest that he'd originally gone into collecting art simply as a means of laundering dirty money. But whatever his reason, it wasn't long before the collecting mania had taken hold full force and whatever Frank wanted Frank had to have. And what Frank wanted now was the Singer Bellman.

There was no way I could have refused to sell to him even if I'd wanted to. I took his money, he took the painting, and that was that. Until now.

Douglas lived northwest of the city, almost at the county line, and if the area lacked the old money cachet of the north shore, at least it was the last place around where there was still enough open land for a truly spacious estate—a fact I suspected that Douglas had capitalized on as much for security reasons as for personal preference. His house was a sprawling brick tudor with fake half timbering on the upper stories, screened from the highway by a well tended stand of pine and approached by a narrow road that turned into a looping drive at the end. There were three cars parked along the far curve when Lovell and I drew up that Friday night.

Fox-face met us at the door. "Well," he said, "the prodigals at last. We were beginning to think something must have happened to you. Like an accident, you know what I mean?"

"No accident," I said. "It's just farther out than I realized."

"It's farther out than a lot of people realize," Fox-face said. He held out his hand. "If you'll let me have your keys, I'll see your car gets put away."

I hesitated a fraction of a second, then handed him my car keys. If it was Douglas's way of insuring I didn't leave before he wanted me to, at least it was a relatively polite method. And there was no point in making an issue of it since there was a second set of keys taped well back under the hood of the car.

Fox-face grinned maliciously, then, putting the keys in his pocket,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

led us inside and over to a large reception room that opened off to the left of the foyer.

Douglas was standing at the far end with two other men, from whom he broke away when he saw us and came over. He reached out and pressed my hand between both of his. "Harry," he said. "Glad you could make it." He wasn't a tall man, but he kept himself in trim and his knobby, almost handsome face was deeply tanned despite the season. Alone of the group, he was dressed formally, in a wine-red dinner jacket tailored so that it fit his slightly uneven shoulders smoothly without a hint of a wrinkle.

"You had us worried there for a while," he told me. "You don't want to do that."

I shrugged. "You had me worried there for a while, too, Frank. Maybe you don't want to do that, either."

For a moment something flickered behind Douglas's eyes, but then the amusement was back. "Same old Harry," he said, dropping my hand and clapping me on the shoulder. He turned to Fox-face. "McCarthy, why don't you show Mr. Lovell his room while Harry and I get reacquainted. You two *are* going to be able to stay the weekend, aren't you?"

"If that's what's planned," I said. "Your boys weren't too clear on the point."

"I'll have to talk to them about that," Douglas said. "But don't worry. Anything you didn't bring, we'll have. McCarthy?"

McCarthy nodded. "All in hand," he said. He touched Lovell on the shoulder. "You want to come with me?"

Lovell threw me a despairing glance and allowed himself to be led away. Douglas watched them go almost fondly. "Good boy, that," he said. "I don't know what I'd do without him."

"Or somebody like him," I said. "What happened to the other boy you used to have?"

Douglas sighed. "What happens to us all, Harry?" he said. "The world doesn't stand still. You move up or you move out. But you don't want to talk about that. Let me introduce you around. You know Coombs and Bissel, I think."

Arthur Coombs was a tall man in his mid- to late-sixties with a thin, patrician face and thinning hair of a startling whiteness. At one time he had had a fairly respectable collection of mid-Nineteenth Century masters, and in fact he was even one of those to whom I had tentatively offered the Bellman portrait. But more recently I'd heard that although he still kept up the facade, his actual collection

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had been quietly disposed of years before. I could believe it, watching him now refilling his glass at the bar with the exaggeratedly careful motion of a man already gone over his limit.

I was more suprised to see Bissel there. Or maybe concerned is the word. Bissel was the Bellman restoration director. He was standing almost directly opposite Coombs, an expression like apprehension on his pale, triangular face.

The third and last guest was a stranger to me. Douglas introduced him as George Strother. He was a slightly built man with a thin mouth continuously trembling on the verge of a nervous smile and eyes that never seemed to rest for long on any one subject.

"I think you two will find you have a lot in common," Douglas said, "but I'm afraid we'll have to leave that for later. I hate to rush you, Harry, when you just got here, but my cook said eight-thirty and that means eight-thirty on the dot." He put his arm around my shoulders and turned to guide me out of the room. "You won't believe what that woman can do with food."

Actually, Douglas's cook was probably every bit as good as he claimed. Lovell looked dubiously at the veal with cheese sauce being served, but when his own plate arrived, it contained only vegetables.

"All organically grown," Douglas told him, grinning. "You see, I do my homework." He let his eyes wander around the table and almost as if on cue Bissel leaned forward and said in a rushed voice, as if he'd been rehearsing the words and was hurrying to get them out before he changed his mind:

"Mr. Douglas, I came here this evening under the impression it was to discuss a donation to the Bellman restoration project. Instead I find—"

"You find what?" Douglas said, still smiling. "A group of people gathered for a friendly meal. Don't worry. You'll get your donation. But later. After all, why spoil good food talking business? Right, Harry?"

"Sure," I said. "Eat, drink, and be merry."

Douglas laughed. "That's what I like about you, Harry. Your mind works the way mine does."

He continued to ramble on expansively throughout the meal, ignoring or oblivious to the fact that our responses were short. Coombs continued to punish the bottle. Bissel ate grudgingly, his eyes remaining wary. Strother, if anything, was more nervous than Lovell.

Finally, it was over. Douglas lounged back in his chair and in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

structed McCarthy to tell the cook she could go home and clean up in the morning.

"Business time?" I said.

Douglas nodded. "Why not?" he said, "Business is what makes the world go round. It's what brought us together in the first place. You sold me a painting. Remember? When was that? Five years ago?"

"Closer to six," I said.

Douglas shook his head. "Time flies. I was just starting my collection then, and there were a lot of people—private collectors, mostly—who wouldn't sell to me. Oh, they always had a good reason—some prior commitment, or they wanted to make the painting available to a wider audience—but you and I know, Harry, that what it really boiled down to was that they didn't much approve of me. I wasn't their kind and no way were they going to let me join the club. What I like about you, Harry, is that you weren't like that. Maybe, though, I should have asked myself why."

I shrugged. "No big secret," I said. "I wanted to sell, you wanted to buy. That's the way most deals are made. Besides," I added, "knowing you, I didn't think it'd do any good to say no."

Douglas laughed. "You're right, Harry," he said. "It wouldn't have. Just as in the end it didn't do those others any good, either. They wouldn't sell to me—well, I just went out and found somebody they would sell to. One of their own kind." He looked at Coombs, who took another long pull from his glass and refused to meet anyone's eyes.

"I always wondered how you found out about the painting," I said.

"Now you know," Douglas said. "I haven't done much buying lately, but Coombs still does me a small service now and then—like letting me know when Strother here showed up one day to ask him, as an expert in the field, if this old painting he said he'd bought at an estate sale was worth anything. What made Coombs think I'd be interested was that the painting Strother showed him was the Singer Bellman—the same painting I bought from you, when was it you said, Harry—close to six years ago?"

He waved a hand negligently. "Naturally, I had to check into it. And I almost hate to tell you this, Harry, but Mr. Strother's story checks out. He is what he says he is—a little man trying to make some big bucks—and he did buy some paintings at an estate sale not long ago just as he says he did."

"Including the painting he's trying to sell you now?"

Douglas grinned. "There you go," he said. "That's the problem.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

All I've got is his word for that—just as all I've got for that painting you sold me is your word you found it where you say you did. Yours and Mr. Bissel's." He glanced over at Bissel, who looked steadfastly down at his plate.

"Mr. Douglas," Strother cut in, "I—"

Douglas, no longer grinning, spared him a brief, hard look. Strother sank back on his chair, took out a handkerchief, and wiped his face.

"What it boils down to then," Douglas said, turning back to me, "is that there are two Bellman portraits, identical as the proverbial two peas in a pod. But only one of them can be the original. The question is which one."

"The only way you'll know that for sure is to send them off to a lab," I said.

"Possibly," Douglas said. "And if I have to, that's just what I'll do. But of course that could create some complications of its own, particularly if somebody started raising questions of legal title. So I'm hoping there's another way." He looked down at McCarthy at the foot of the table. "Everything set up?"

McCarthy nodded.

"Fine," Douglas said. "Well, gentlemen, shall we proceed to the next step?" He rose and, still playing the genial host, ushered us back to the reception room—unchanged, except for a large covered easel set up at one end. Douglas moved past us toward it, and with a dramatic gesture threw back the covering to reveal the two Bellman portraits—neither of them framed.

"There you are, gentlemen," he said. "Before I removed the frames, I marked the back of each canvas to indicate which is the Strother Bellman and which, shall we say, is the restoration."

Coombs began to laugh, a high-pitched giggle that threatened to go out of control. "Gentlemen," he said, holding up the glass he'd brought with him from the table, "let me salute our host, the ultimate collector. Two paintings and he has to *mark* them to tell which is his." He steadied himself with an effort and regarded Douglas scornfully. "Tell me, Douglas, do you ever *look* at what you own—enjoy the colors, marvel at the technique? Or do you just gloat over your possessions the way a miser gloats over gold he's afraid to take out of a bag for fear some of it will melt in the light?"

Douglas was silent for a long moment, his eyes never leaving Coombs. When he did speak, it was in a surprisingly mild tone. "I know what I paid for," he said, "and that's what I intend to have."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After a pause he added: "I thought I knew what I was paying for when I bought you, too. Are you going to prove me wrong?"

Coombs continued to meet his eyes for another few seconds, then abruptly drained his glass and lurched off toward the bar.

"As I was saying—" Douglas turned back to the paintings "—they have been marked. And I'd like to have you tell me which is the original." He let his eyes wander over our little group. "I know you're no expert, Harry. Your partner is, but if you don't mind I think I'd like a more impartial opinion. You, Mr. Bissel."

Bissel looked around, flustered. "Not me," he said. "I'm an architect, not a painter."

"No," Douglas agreed, "but architects and painters have instincts in common. I'd like to hear what those instincts say."

Bissel hesitated, then, wetting his lips, stepped forward to study the paintings. Finally he shook his head. "*I* can't tell," he said. "They both look the same to me."

Douglas shrugged and looked at Lovell. "Well, Mr. Lovell," he said, "I guess I have to rely on you, after all."

For a long time, Lovell did nothing but look at the paintings. Then he moved closer and ran his hand carefully over the surface of first one, then the other. After another long moment, he repeated the gesture, then stepped back and indicated the one to the left.

Douglas leaned forward intently. "Why that one?"

"The surface," Lovell said. "It would take an X-ray to be sure, but on the one you can sense the ridges where the artist layered paint to build up his effects. The other's too smooth. That's characteristic of a copy where only the surface appearance is important."

"That's interesting," Douglas said. "Especially since the painting you picked as authentic is the one Strother's been trying to sell me."

For a minute I was afraid Lovell was going to do something stupid. His jaw dropped a figurative foot, but then he caught hold of himself, closed his mouth firmly, and simply stood watching Douglas.

"Can't think of anything to say?" Douglas asked him. "How about you, Harry? No? Well, I'm sure you'll both think of something sooner or later." He broke off and cocked his head as a sudden sharp rattle of rain against the window announced that the storm that had been threatening all day had finally broken. He grinned. "It's a good thing you were planning to stay over, gentlemen. There's no way I'd let you go out on a night like this."

My room was a pleasant one on the second floor facing the back,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with a connecting door to Lovell's adjoining room. He joined me after Douglas had adjourned his party and sent us all up to bed.

"He's lying, Harry," Lovell said. "There's no way that painting could be Strother's."

"You couldn't be wrong?"

"Of course not. Even if they were close—which they're not—I'd know my own work."

"Yeah, well, for God's sake, don't tell *that* to Douglas. In fact, don't tell Douglas anything. Just keep your mouth shut and follow my lead."

"Of course," Lovell said. But being Lovell, of course, that didn't stop him worrying. "But what about Bissel?"

"He could be a problem," I admitted. "But right now I think he's too worried about his precious reputation to do more than curl up into a ball if anybody looks at him suspiciously. I'll leave it to you to see he gets the message to keep it that way. This is one time confession is *not* good for the soul."

"Whatever you say." Lovell paused with his hand on the door to his room. "What's Douglas trying to prove here anyway, Harry? Why doesn't he just do whatever he's going to and get it over with?"

"For the same reason he insisted on going through that charade of a dinner before springing his little surprise. He knows that the more people sweat the more likely they are to panic and make a mistake. Just make sure you don't."

Lovell nodded nervously and went out, and for a long time I stood by the window looking out at the rain. Something nagged at the back of my mind—something Douglas had said to me or I had said to him earlier in the evening. But I couldn't remember quite what it was, or why it bothered me. Finally I gave it up and went to bed.

I must have slept, because I woke suddenly to darkness. Something—a noise, I thought, just beyond the edge of my consciousness—had disturbed me. Not a usual household noise, either, I was sure as I reached for the lamp switch. Apparently, though, the storm had knocked out the electricity because it didn't work. I pulled on a robe and went out to the hallway.

And was hit full in the face by a flashlight beam.

"Lose something?" McCarthy said.

"I thought I heard a noise."

"Like what?"

"That's the problem. I don't know."

McCarthy snorted. "It must have been the ghosts," he said. "Doug-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

las had them brought over specially from England to give the place class."

"Funny, I thought that was why he kept you around."

"That, too," McCarthy said. "Now if I was you, I'd go back to bed. Mr. Douglas wouldn't like it if you got yourself hurt wandering around in the dark."

"I'll bet he wouldn't," I said and did go back to bed. Eventually I slept again.

It was full light the second time I awoke. The storm had blown over and the landscape outside my window sparkled under a bright sun. I dressed and went downstairs to find Lovell in the kitchen preparing his own breakfast. A stout, grey-haired woman in an apron watched him with a mixture of amusement and exasperation.

"I suppose you want to make your own, too," she said to me.

"No," I said. "I'm not fussy. I'll take whatever's offered."

"Good," the woman said. "Go back to the dining room and as soon as I get my stove back I'll bring you something."

I did as she said. Bissel and Strother were already there, seated at opposite ends of the table and each doing his best to pretend he was alone. Neither said anything as I sat down midway between them. A few minutes later, Coombs came in. His eyes were a network of blotchy red lines but otherwise he seemed to bear no ill effects from the alcohol he'd downed the night before. He gave me a wry smile. "I hope you'll excuse me for my behavior last night."

"You didn't do anything needing to be excused," I said.

His smile turned a little more genuine. "I'm glad to hear that. I find there are days when I forget, so I've made it a habit to apologize as a matter of principle." He sat down across from me. "I trust there's coffee."

McCarthy came in and after a quick, frowning look around the room demanded: "Where's your partner?"

"You mean Lovell? In the kitchen," I said. "Why?"

For answer, McCarthy continued to stand glowering where he was—then, as Lovell pushed through the door leading from the kitchen; he drew a gun from under his coat and pointed it at him. Somehow Lovell managed to keep from dropping his tray. McCarthy gestured with the gun. "Over there," he said. "Beside your partner. No, you just stay where you are, Harry," he added quickly, moving to cover me as well. "And keep your hands where I can see them."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What's this supposed to mean, McCarthy?" I said. "Another of Douglas's little jokes?"

"No joke," McCarthy said. "Douglas is dead. You two killed him."

"That's ridiculous," Lovell said.

"See if the cops think so when they find out about that phony painting you sold him and how he caught you out." He half turned and looked down at Coombs. "You sober?" he said, and when Coombs nodded he handed him the gun. "Make sure these two don't go anywhere while I make the call." He went out.

Coombs smiled as if embarrassed and held the gun limply pointing at nothing in particular. "Is Douglas really dead?" he said.

"You heard the same thing I did," I said.

Coombs smiled again. "Yes," he said. "It's funny in a way, you know. Ironic. The times I wished that man dead, and now here I sit guarding his alleged murderers."

"Thanks for the benefit of the doubt," I said.

"My pleasure," Coombs said. "Under slightly different circumstances, you might very well be holding the gun on me, but fortunately I continued to—ah—indulge after the rest of you left last night to the point where McCarthy had to put me to bed. So I'm afraid I wasn't in any condition to murder anyone. Although I suppose in a sense I can take some small credit for the act. If I hadn't told Douglas about Strother's painting, none of this would have happened, would it?"

"That's right," I said. "You told him about both paintings."

Coombs nodded. "It was pure spite the second time," he said. "He had everything I valued or wanted and they might have been so many matchbook covers for all he knew or cared. If you want to leave, go ahead. I won't stop you."

I shook my head. "It wouldn't solve anything."

McCarthy came back and took back the gun. He looked at us suspiciously. "What's been going on here?" he said.

"Just talk," I said. "Coombs was wondering if Douglas was really dead."

"Oh, he's dead all right," McCarthy said. "Shot twice with a .22. The gun's still where you dropped it."

"That was kind of stupid of me, wasn't it?" I said. "Kill a man, leave the gun right there where it's sure to be found, and then wait around to be arrested."

McCarthy shook his head. "You talk good," he said. "But it's all bluff. It's not going to work this time, though. You and Lovell were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the only ones with any reason to kill Douglas. All the talk in the world isn't going to change that."

"I wouldn't be so sure if I were you," I said. "That was the other thing we were talking about just now—how badly Coombs wanted Douglas dead. He says he was too drunk last night, but was he really? Or does he just want us to think he was? Or, for that matter, don't forget Bissel—he was part of the original sale, too. He'd have as much, if not more, to lose as the rest of us."

Bissel gasped. "How dare you—"

McCarthy grinned. "See what I mean?" he said. "Bluff. If you're smart, Harry, you'll save your stuff for the cops. They'll be here soon enough."

They were. McCarthy had barely finished speaking when two blue caps and a team of paramedics pounded in.

The paramedics confirmed McCarthy's diagnosis that Douglas was dead. Other cops began arriving in shifts: homicide detectives, technicians of all kinds, medical examiner's men. There was a lot of bustle and noise and comings and goings, a good part of which I suspected had less to do with the murder investigation than with a police attempt to cash in on a heaven-sent opportunity to find out something of what was going on in the mob these days. Eventually a uniformed officer came into the library where we'd all been herded and escorted McCarthy out. Twenty minutes later he came back without McCarthy, asked which of us was Harry Lang, and when I said I was beckoned me to follow.

He took me down a short hallway to what I assume was Douglas's study. It was a small, dark paneled room dominated by a large oak desk at which a grey-haired beefy-faced man in a rumpled blue suit sat leafing through some papers. His credentials, spread out face-up in front of him, identified him as Detective Sergeant Joseph Driscoll. A younger, sprucer detective sat off to one side armed with a steno pad and a pencil.

The first thing Driscoll did after telling me to sit down and verifying that I was Harry Lang was to toss aside the papers and read me my rights in a rapid monotone. It was hardly an encouraging beginning, but then it wasn't intended to be. When I had nodded that yes, I understood, he leaned back in his chair and studied me. Finally he said: "Why don't you just tell us what happened here last night?"

"Starting when?"

"Say when you first got here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was no point holding anything back. He'd already heard McCarthy's version. I told him as briefly and factually as I could what had happened from the time Lovell and I arrived until the party broke up for the night.

"And then?"

"I went to bed."

"All night?"

"No. Something woke me. I went out in the hall to investigate, ran into McCarthy, and went back to bed—this time for all night. Or what was left of it."

"Yeah," Driscoll said, "McCarthy said he found you wandering around the halls. About what time was this?"

"I have no idea. The power was off and I didn't look at my watch. Incidentally, if anybody was wandering the halls, it was McCarthy. He was the one with the flashlight. I never went more than two feet from the door to my room."

"I asked him what he was doing in the hall when he encountered you." Driscoll nodded. "He said the same as you—that he heard a noise and went out to see what it was. He thinks it was you, and now you're saying you think it was him. Of course, it's possible both of you are telling the truth and it was some third party that made whatever noise it was—the assumption being it was the shot that killed Douglas. A .22 isn't very loud—maybe not much louder than a door slamming. In that case, you'd both be in the clear. But, frankly, if I had to bet one of you is lying, I'd bet it's you."

"Why? Because I allegedly sold Douglas a copy of a painting for an original six years ago?"

Driscoll laughed. "That's the first time I ever heard anybody use the word 'alleged' in connection with his own statement. But, yeah, because of that."

"Except that I never said I sold Douglas a copy. All I said—and all that can be established despite what anybody says—is that Douglas claimed the painting my partner identified as the original was the one Strother has been trying to sell."

"It seems to me that comes to the same thing," Driscoll said.

"Not really. Douglas could have been mistaken. Or lying."

"Now why would he do that?"

"I have no idea," I said, "and I don't claim he *did* lie. Only that he could have. But for the sake of argument, let's assume he didn't. And let's agree, too, that the chances of two paintings so similar being produced independently of each other are so small as to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

virtually nonexistent. But all this talk about which is the original and which is the copy only draws attention from the really important question. Which is *when* was the copy made?"

"Yeah? What's so important about that?"

"Everything. Think about it for a minute—like I did all that time you had us waiting in the library. We know from the record that no copy was made before the painting was lost. Obviously none was made while it was lost, either. Which leaves only two reasonable alternatives: one, that Lovell and I made the copy at the time we discovered the original, or, two, that it was made after we'd sold it."

"Are you trying to tell me now that Douglas would have copied his own painting?"

"It's not out of the realm of possibility," I said. "It might have appealed to his sense of humor to pass a fake off onto one of those uprig[illegible] collectors who piously refused to sell to him. But there's one big stumbling block: Coombs. Coombs is—or rather, was—Douglas's man. Douglas might have used him as a front, but he never would have sent Strother to him with a story that Coombs, knowing all he did about what had gone before, would be bound to recognize as phony."

"Which seems to put the finger right back on you," Driscoll said.

I shook my head. "No, same stumbling block. Lovell and I couldn't reapproach the people we'd contacted before with a different story about the painting's origins any more than Douglas could. Even more importantly, we wouldn't dare. There was too much chance that whoever had leaked the story to Douglas before would do it again—which, in fact, is exactly what happened.

"So it really all boils down to somebody else with access to Douglas's collection. Coombs? Not likely. By both his and Douglas's admission, there's been no contact between them for years. Bissel? No. Strother? Definitely not. I suppose it could be the cook, but when you check into it I think you'll find the only one who really fits the bill is McCarthy.

"I have an advantage, of course. I *know* that Lovell and I didn't make the copy—but what I can reason out, so can others. I think Douglas had already pretty well narrowed it down to McCarthy, too. In which case, the whole business of pressuring Lovell and me to come, the menace just below the surface and all the rest of it was just smokescreen to keep McCarthy from guessing his real purpose—which was to find out just how badly he was being burned. If McCarthy and his assumed partner, Strother, were selling the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

copies they made, that was one thing, and probably the worst Douglas would have done was cut himself in for most of the pie. But when Lovell picked the one Strother was selling as the original—well, you can figure that out yourself."

Driscoll looked at me thoughtfully. "Very pretty," he said. "Except for one thing. Working for Douglas, McCarthy would have known about the connection with Coombs, too."

"Not necessarily," I said. "McCarthy didn't start working for Douglas until fairly recently—until after he'd bought the Bellman portrait. But there's an easy way for you to check it out. Why don't you call Strother in and tell him that Lovell and I routinely X-ray all paintings that come into our possession and that I'm insisting that the two present paintings be X-rayed now and the results compared with the plate made at the time we sold ours to Douglas?"

Driscoll gave me another long, thoughtful stare. Then he called back the policeman who'd brought me in. "Put this bird where he won't bother anybody," he said. "Then bring me the one called Strother."

I spent the next several hours in the bedroom I'd spent the night in, this time with a cop outside the door. I tried the connecting door once out of curiosity. It was locked.

Finally, there was a slight shuffling outside, the door opened, and Driscoll entered.

"You can go," he said.

"Just like that?"

"Sure. What else do you want?"

"Well, for a start you might tell me what happened with Strother."

The detective shrugged. "Sure, why not? It'll all come out in the papers. It was all pretty much the way you figured it. Strother and McCarthy had a nice little racket going, substituting copies for Douglas's pictures and selling the originals secretly. Strother says it was really his brother-in-law and McCarthy's idea, his brother-in-law being the artist who did the actual painting. According to Strother, they just brought him in as front man and probable fall guy. He's particularly bitter nobody bothered to tell him Coombs used to work for Douglas. He says the killing was all McCarthy's work, too. He didn't know anything about it until this morning and was shocked when he heard. He claims he thought it was you or your partner until he heard about the X-rays." Driscoll looked at me speculatively. "You really have them?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No," I said.

Driscoll nodded. "I didn't think so. But your bluff worked and you're home free. Before you start thinking yourself the next Sherlock Holmes, though, there's one thing you ought to know. I got two years' night law school and one of the first things they teach you is that you can't prove a negative fact. So if Strother had stuck to his story about buying the original at an estate auction, there's no way you could have proved the one you found wasn't a copy that, despite what the records say, had to have been made when the original was still hanging in the Bellman hotel. In which case, there would have been nobody left to take the heat but you."

He was wrong there, because if worse had come to worst there was a way we could have proven Strother's painting had to have been made after ours. "But," as I commented to Lovell later as we were driving back to the city, "that would have meant admitting we had forged the 'original' in the first place. That was the problem right from the beginning—proving what we knew had to have happened without giving away how we knew."

"What will happen now?" Lovell asked.

I shrugged. "I imagine justice will run its course. But that's the cops' and the court's problem, not ours."

"I meant about the painting. Will there be any trouble about our selling it without title?"

"If there is, it'll be a civil action, not criminal. I don't think it's too likely there will be, though. I suspect Douglas's heirs aren't going to want any more publicity or poking around in his affairs and will settle the matter by quietly donating it to one of the city museums, or maybe to the restoration project itself." I laughed. "That'll put Bissel in a nice fix, won't it?"

Lovell shook his head. "I don't know, Harry," he said. "This has taught me one thing. Never again. I mean it. From now on, we're strictly legitimate."

"Well, of course," I said. "After all, that's been the idea all along, hasn't it?"

I said it with a straight face, too.

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a prize-winning story by

BARBARA HAFEN

"You ladies ain't from around here," Dauntsey said to the two women customers. They always expect you to say ain't, he thought. "I know every living soul in this part of the country. Been here as long as the town has—eighty-six years. Been a sheriff's deputy fifty of them eighty-six, ever since this was part of Jasper County."

A complicated and fascinating character, Dauntsey, and very much at the heart of this story, which won first prize in the short-story contest sponsored by the tenth Cabrillo Suspense Writers Conference, the contest, as in the past, expertly judged by a committee headed by Dennis Lynds (a.k.a. Michael Collins, William Arden, Maxwell Grant, etc.) . . .

OLD BONES

by BARBARA HAFEN

Through the window I could see the storm sloping away west over Horse Mountain, letting a little sunshine soak through the cottonwoods for a change from all that rain. But then the clouds come back right away.

All the clocks in the shop was going to beat the band except for the one I had down on the bench working on, hollowed out like a man on the operating table, with its big flat brass heart laying in my hand. Your old-fashion-type clocks make a lot of racket. They're company. Not like them modern things—they're not human. So naturally I didn't hear anybody coming up the steps and onto the linoleum inside.

It was two ladies, took me by surprise. I can still hear just fine, but it was the noise of the clocks.

© 1986 by Barbara Hafen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I said, "Oh, I can't talk to ladies," but I had to get up from behind the counter just the same. Hell, they ought to be able to see this is noplace for customers any more. I don't need them. I don't keep a thing in the front window but about a half inch of dust and a few local rock specimens. Of course, there's still the sign, Diamonds and Watches. It's small and practically weathered away, but once in a while it'll throw a stranger off like that and he'll come in wanting to buy something.

I could tell these people would be the kind that would be hard to get rid of—their eyes was rambling all around up and over the shelves and ceiling and floor, trying to take in everything at once. They was good-looking young women, quite dressed up, and either they hadn't heard what I said or decided they heard wrong. One of them spoke up. "Do you happen to have any cufflinks?" She was dark-complected, with a fine figure.

Cufflinks! Hell. "Well, now, I don't know. Maybe." You play along with them a little bit, sometimes they'll give in and go away sooner. The glass top of the counter where there used to be knickknacks of that nature was so scratched up it looked like a foggy day and I had to bend over and feel around inside. Sure enough, there turned out to be two–three pairs, tarnished. "You don't want these," I said.

"Well—" She had that faraway, discontented look they get when they aren't going to be satisfied with you having to haul out less than half your belongings. Mostly it's people that get silly over antiques act this way. I have got so I can recognize the symptoms.

The other lady was stylish, too, but scrawny to my way of thinking, with red hair all bushed-out and a kind of quirky smile like she was sucking a sour lemondrop. I said, just to be polite while I was putting the cufflinks back where they belonged, "You ladies ain't from around here." (They always expect you to say "ain't.") I looked down at my hands under the grey glass among the glimmers of my old gold and jewelry, neatening everything up again, then I looked up at her sharp.

"How do you know?" she said.

"I know every living soul in this part of the country. Been here as long as the town has—eighty-six years. Been a sheriff's deputy fifty of them eighty-six, ever since this was a part of Jasper County."

"But I might have just moved here."

She had me there. "Why on earth would you want to do a thing like that?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why, because it's quiet and unspoiled, like a little oasis. It's a beautiful town."

"Beautiful! What's beautiful about it?"

"The trees, the air, the desert. Everything. The people."

She was one of those queer souls you have to watch. I've seen that kind many a time—they're usually women. But I won't stand for being called beautiful by any tourist antique collector, like I was something she expected to buy. People nowadays are too free with their personal remarks.

The other lady, the dark one, was studying my clocks hot and heavy. I don't object to a mannerly interest, as long as they keep their hands to themselves. "I repair those timepieces, lady," I said. "They ain't merchandise for sale. I tried to retire from business fifteen years ago but they kept on bringing me stuff to fix, like fancy picture frames and watches, so I had to give in and get me another shop. I used to own that building The Toggery is in now, down on Main Street. Maybe you noticed it if you've been strolling around."

"Yes, we did," the dark one said. "I noticed the sandstone carvings. The cornices are very unusual."

"Oldest building in town still standing, outside of a few falling-down log cabins."

The redhead was standing by the open door with her nose up like a sheep dog. "Does it always smell so wonderful around here?" All I could smell was my own pipe tobacco and the wet plaster from rain leaking through the ceiling of the lean-to back room. It had been storming off and on for two–three days. The sky outside looked like bad bruises and the cottonwood trees was starting to creak and groan again. Water from the morning downpour was still rushing down the ditch almost as high as the banks. She was squinting her eyes, trying hard to get it all. "That smell is sage, isn't it?"

I didn't know but what I thought she was kind of entertaining after all. I've always had a weakness for peculiar people—in fact, I'm by way of being a collector. I decided I might let her see my scrapbook later. I said, "Sagebrush, yes, that's what you smell. There was some hail earlier—it beats the daylights out of the bushes and it does smell nice if you take a minute and notice."

"Oh, my!" the other one said. "Tell us all about this!" She was running her fingers in a more than friendly way over my old silver pitcher that sits on the north end of the bench with the clocks. It has devil faces and flowers and the like all over it, and the figurine of a bare nude female curved around for a handle.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now," I said, "you're not getting that."

"Well," she said, somewhat huffy, "I didn't ask you for it. I just wondered whether or not there's a story in connection with it."

"Not much of a one. I got it from a friend of mine has a carpentry shop. He was using it to hold nuts and bolts and he give it to me for a remembrance." I could see they was both disappointed They probably hoped it came from some kind of old wealthy haunted house or something. I don't know why, but I felt like I owed them a little story. "You ever hear of Billy Bird?"

The redhead caught me right up. "Oh, yes! Everybody loved Billy Bird!"

Loved him! I was right—she was queer as a two-dollar bill.

"Well," she said, "you know they made that movie, and the legends do treat him as a sort of hero—as outlaws go."

"Well, I don't know about that, lady, but I'll tell you one thing, he wasn't as bad as the law made out. Just a young fellow got into trouble and then they started blaming everything on him from soup to nuts."

She nodded. It didn't seem to take much to make her sad. She had big grey eyes. I said, "This was his hometown, you know."

"No! Really?"

"I knew him very well. We was about the same age." I give them a minute for the thrill to sink in and then said, "My house is built right dead center of Billy Bird's land." Then I proceeded to tell them a lot of local Bird tales, some middling tall, and you could see the redhead felt like she had got ahold of a big box of cherry chocolates. The dark one was still keeping the corner of her eye on my silver pitcher.

"What did he look like?" says redhead.

"Well, I suppose you might say he was a good-looking man aside from the fact his nose was broke and never set right. Big curly-headed fellow, liked to dance and talk. I tell you, he could do imitations—I never saw anybody on the stage or screen could demonstrate and palaver like Billy could. I might have a picture someplace I could show you."

The weather being so wet, my hip wasn't behaving its best, but just the same I got down and reached underneath my safe (the big black fellow I had moved from my other building, with my name on it) and pulled out my scrapbook.

Most of the stuff wasn't glued in. Some of the newspaper clippings had gone yellow as autumn leaves, and that famous snapshot of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Billy was so faded out I might as well have had them look into a glass of buttermilk. Still, the eyes and grin showed up. It was took when we was both about twelve, on a Sunday on the Birds' front porch.

"Oh, my, that's wonderful," they both said. "He was so handsome." Then the redhead said, "I wonder, Mr. Dauntsey, if I brought a tape recorder and a notebook sometime, if you would have any objection to telling some of those stories again?"

"Lady, I have to tell you you're butting into my business. I've got them all wrote down already and someday I'm going to have them put in a book—soon as I can get ahold of somebody with a typewriter." That's the only way to deal with people that want to get their hands on your property. Be blunt.

But I could see it kind of hurt her feelings, and they looked like they was getting set to go, so I said just for politeness, "Take a look at this here." It was a newspaper clipping with a picture and a long article. "That's me and my wife on our sixtieth wedding anniversary. They made a real big thing out of it. She passed away right after."

"Sapphira—" the redhead said. "What a strange, lovely name. She was a very pretty woman."

"Well, she was once a pretty girl. I wouldn't have had her if she wasn't."

Too damn pretty. But then I've always been a quick thinker and I never did allow any backtalk even from her, so her looks never got to be a bad problem after that one time. Still, it had been risky to pay Phira a compliment like that right out loud—I never knew whether her and him might be hanging around the storeroom (my theory is that dead men's bones act somewhat on the order of a magnet) and how would I explain a laugh coming from back there? Besides, it was getting close to the time they were liable to come and see me home from the shop—and a very dark day. It was safer to change the subject. I slammed the scrapbook shut.

"Well," says the dark-complected one, "thank you very much, Mr. Dauntsey. I hate to leave, but our husbands will think we've been kidnaped."

"Hold on just a minute." I could see they was the kind that would enjoy seeing my collection of arrowheads and old-fashion coins. They was in cigar boxes under the safe, packed in pieces of purple velvet that really showed them off. Some of my agate bird points, especially, are pretty as cameos. They'd look very high class set in a lavaliere,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for example—but I wouldn't let anybody have them for a thing like that.

As might be expected, their men come looking for them about then, so to be mannerly I had to go through the business of showing my things all over again and telling a couple of stories. The redhead told her husband, "Mr. Dauntsey was a deputy sheriff around here for many years."

"That so? It sounds like you've had a really interesting life, Mr. Dauntsey," he said. "You girls pick up anything we need to carry?"

"Not a thing around here," I said, not wanting to get that fuss started up again. Then the idea come to me I should show them something to back up my claim about being a lawman. "But wait just a minute now." I went in the back room. I was glad to see neither her nor him was there. Out I come with the old gun barrel from behind the door and laid it on the counter. "What would you guess this thing here is?"

They all sighted down the hole and noticed it was just in one end. "Part of an old muzzle loader?" says the dark one's husband.

"Right. The stock got chewed away by rats. "And—" Quick as a flash I brought out the old powder horn. "This is what I found with it. Go on, shake it. Hear the powder in there? It's still good. I had to pry the plug out and try it."

"Heavens!" said the dark lady. "Where did these relics come from?"

"A sort of cave called Mrs. Purvis's Pot. A dangerous place with underground ledges and the like. Some boys was exploring there a few years back and happened to come on a pack rat's nest. I was called to go clean it out. These things was in it, totally buried in trash."

"How fascinating. Did you find anything else? Buried treasure?"

I shook my head. "Nothing to speak of at all. Well, just one thing." Right then and there from behind the door to the back room I drug out my gunny sack and opened it up slow as could be so they could all look in, like down a dark well. "Here's the fellow that owned the stuff."

For a minute or two they was too impressed to say anything. I took the skull out from among the other bones and offered to let the redhead hold it, but she didn't care to.

"Most likely it's some Indian skellington or other," I said.

The redhead gave me a look out of those grey eyes. "Aren't these pretty big bones for a Western Indian? I always thought the Ourays

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in this part of the country were inclined to be small." No doubt about it, she thought she was being quite the lady detective.

"Not necessarily," I said, and put everything back in the lean-to nice and neat where they belonged.

Well, it was getting late and starting to sprinkle again and I could see they was too polite to use up any more of my time—not like that professor or whatever he was that wanted to steal all my stories that time and make some kind of a scholarship out of them. He even tried to get me to sing.

On her way out, the redhead stopped and looked up kind of sad at a shelf full of blue-glass knickknacks. I don't know why I did it, but I reached right up and took a piece down and blew the dust off it. The silver rim was black as the ace of spades but it would polish up. "You like this pickle dish, lady? They don't make them with feet on like this nowadays."

"Oh, yes, it's nice," she said kind of wary and sideways. "How much is it?"

I kept her in suspense, looking it over every whichway for a label. —though I knew there never was one. "Well, this here's a real expensive piece. Twenty cents. Used to be thirty."

They all laughed and she paid, and I took my time wrapping it up in brown paper and string. I knew her kind. She wouldn't take it home and put pickles in it—no, she'd set it on the table in her front room and use it to show the neighbors and brag on. I said, "There now, ain't that neat?"

"It's lovely," she said. "Thank you."

They all ducked and run for their car except her. She stopped on the step and looked back at me and said like it was some kind of a secret, "Tell me, Mr. Dauntsey, how long ago did Billy Bird die? I don't believe I ever heard."

"You nor nobody else, lady. Nobody knows. Anyhow," I said very sharp, "what makes you so sure he's dead?"

She didn't say a word, just stood there giving me that straight look and the smile that only tipped one side of her mouth. I had to laugh. You know how if somebody wants to look at you through the binoculars, it brings you up closer than they have any business getting you, and there's nothing you can do about it. "Oh, well, he would be dead by now," I said. "He'd be as old as me."

She kind of shook her head, give me both sides of the smile, and run after the others. In a way I felt sorry to see her go. She would

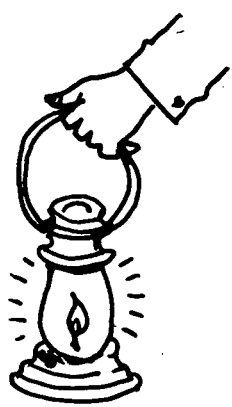
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have got used to me in a hurry and we could have talked about one thing and another.

It was funny, there still was nobody in the back room. They was put out, I suppose, because I showed the bones to strangers. Billy had a kind of modesty, like, about them, and I could understand that all right. And I had to respect Phira's feelings about them while she was alive, as she was one of them women who always took a lot of care about hanging the underwear to dry on the inside lines and so forth. But, hell, I couldn't see what difference it made any more. Let the two of them sulk all they wanted, that's the way I felt about it.

I finished putting that clock together while the rain gradually slowed down, then locked up shop and started home, still alone. The sidewalk looked like a patchwork quilt made out of ripped poplar leaves and patches of red mud.

Everybody in town had finished the milking and gone inside. I could see their kitchen lights coming on, early as it was, through the thrashing branches, and all along the western range fork-lightning kept at the sky like toothache. It was getting darker all the time—put me in mind of black marble with gold veins running through. That's a rare kind of stone, but I've got one or two good specimens in my collection that I'll show those people if they ever come back. I might even show them the furniture in my house, too. They'd probably think the whole lot was valuable antiques.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

Among Charter Day events were a pageant, a carnival, sports, country dancing, and a contest to select Miss Parsett Charter 1947. The place was thronged. "Oh, you've started something," Slatter agreed ruefully. "Traffic jams, public drunkenness and disorder, and a pal of mine at the Yard tells me half the pickpockets in South London caught the 10:20 A.M. *express from Victoria—they should be arriving any minute."*

We love this story . . .

THE RHYMING COPPERS

by JEFFRY SCOTT

The most innocent object—an elegant vase, a pretty wisp of scarf—can be turned to evil account and hold lethal potential. On the same principle, my friend Slatter argues that there is no such thing as a harmless joke.

Protest over such killjoy philosophy and retired policeman Slatter, ex-Superintendent with an elephant's memory, smiles pityingly. Then he recalls the affair of The Rhyming Coppers and how it led to Hector, Argent, and Dunstable being prime suspects in the Bad Penny's murder.

It happened long ago in Sussex, England. Mr. Slatter fears that something similar could occur again anywhere in the world, tomorrow. "I mean a killer getting the most powerful accomplices going: the police. I was one of 'em, more fool me."

Slatter was a Detective-Sergeant at the time, stationed in Parsett, a fair-sized Sussex town some sixty miles from London. Naturally, he knew all three men involved. Dunstable was a solemn, raw young

© 1986 by Jeffry Scott

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PC; Ronnie Argent another, much less raw, being spoken of for swift promotion. Colin Hector, a Detective-Inspector, was Slatter's boss.

Those names were distinctive enough, but not outlandish. Chance, and a drunk's childish sense of humor, brought them local fame.

Rumors about PC Argent were confirmed when he went into the witness box at Parsett Old Town magistrates' court with three stripes on his sleeve and the faintest throb of pride in his announcement of a new rank. Unfortunately, Wimble was there, waiting for his usual two-pound fine before hurrying off to the nearest pub by morning opening time.

His real name was William Lee, but even policemen tended to refer to him as Wimble because that's how he mumbled it when they were booking him. Wimble heard the former PC Argent's opening words and chuckled ripely. Thanks to the brewers, Wimble was never quite sure whether he was thinking or uttering.

So, rather loudly, he exclaimed, "*Sergeant* Argent! Now we got the full set—Inspector Hector, Sergeant Argent, and Constable Dunstable." The magistrates' clerk grinned fleetingly before looking stuffy, Sergeant Argent went red and lost his thread, and the Chairman of the Bench glared around.

"Sorry, Yer Reverence," Wimble mumbled, sounding nothing of the kind. "But it is a bit of a laugh."

A reporter from the Parsett *Gazette* was there and he agreed with Wimble. A whimsical little item appeared in the paper. It was picked up by the *Daily Telegraph,* a dauntingly po-faced organ with a soft spot for the sort of squib informing Britain that a Mr. Codd runs the White Fish Authority or Lord Noah is high in the councils of the Shipbuilding Federation.

"We'd come through six years of war," Mr. Slatter sighs, "so even folk who ought to have known better were hungry for fun. Catchphrases and slogans were all the thing. Mind you, if Parsett hadn't been such a bloomin' graveyard, The Rhyming Coppers wouldn't have made such a stir."

Mr. Slatter's a touch hard on his bygone territory. Still, while Sussex is a tourist-poster county packed with showplace towns, Parsett isn't one of them. Well inland, it lacks Brighton's seaside raciness. It's old without being really ancient, like Battle, where England met a new master in 1066. There are picturesque parts of Parsett, but, for quaintness, trek a few miles down the road and explore Winchelsea or Rye, where Henry James lived.

"Being a dull hole, The Rhyming Coppers nonsense stood out in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

contrast," Slatter grumbles. "Nearly a nuisance, when the craze was at its height. Tourists going up to chaps in uniform, asking if they were one of The Rhyming Coppers, kids calling out to them in the street. The best joke wears thin and this 'un was flimsy to start with. It got on some of the blokes' nerves.

"Inspector Hector wasn't bothered, but then he was a cold fish, supercontrolled. Though for a would-be iron man, when he lost his temper it was like Hiroshima. He lost his temper with the Bad Penny once, which was—unfortunate.

"Ronnie Argent blustered when children teased him, but he loved his new stripes and was pretty fond of himself, too, actually. Secretly, I think he enjoyed everyone knowing his name. As for Constable Dunstable—there! Makes you smile. I suppose it does have a bit of a comical ring, some people are easily amused. Nobody asked what Dunstable made of it. Your humble PC was seen but not heard in those days, but no doubt he had his feelings.

"Anyway, the point is that they were without doubt the three most celebrated policemen in Parsett, and probably Sussex for that matter. So when the Bad Penny kicked the bucket after saying what he did, and with all The Rhyming Coppers in range at the time—"

Mr. Slatter tails away, shaking his head. "The beastly thing was, The Rhyming Coppers had means, motive, and opportunity, individually or mob-handed. It looked infernally bad for one or more of them."

Given that they always turn up, the Bad Penny's nickname was inevitable. Philip St. Clair Penny was a cankered bud on an otherwise dead Parsett family tree. The family had been yeomen, merchants, and professional people in the district for generations. By 1947, Phil Penny was the last survivor, his parents having been killed in an air raid.

He kept turning up at Parsett to draw his quarterly pittance from a law firm. It couldn't be posted because he had no fixed address. Something to do with coyness over paying rent, not to mention a penchant for robbing landladies' gas meters.

Penny was twenty-seven and liked to pass as a combat veteran, sporting a paratrooper's red beret in the hope of fooling innocent civilians—preferably female. He liked them young, but made frequent exceptions for flighty married women. His Army service had been spent on the Home Front, mainly in military prison, until peace broke out and a weary War Office discharged him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Bad Penny had spells when he spread his talents around Sussex," Mr. Slatter explains dryly. "Went to Winchelsea, togged himself out in yachting gear, and cut a dash until they twigged what he was. Then he moved on to Rye for a summer and found a soppy widow with money, only she wasn't enough—Penny ran a mistress on the side and her husband came home early from night shift, so Rye was too hot to hold him. A bookmaker ran him out of Brighton the following year. That was rubber checks, not women. At the time of his death, Phil Penny was back in Parsett, licking his wounds."

His own choice of phrase makes Mr. Slatter wince. "A worthless, exasperating chap, the Bad Penny. But somehow I nearly liked him. Totally inept when he broke the law, a fool to himself. Bags of the old public-school charm. Well, he'd been expelled from some of the best, and at least the veneer had stuck.

"As bad luck would have it, Phil Penny got across every one of The Rhyming Coppers. Young PC Dunstable had clashed with him in public and come off worse, because for once Penny *wasn't* out of order. There's no law against wearing badgeless bits of service uniform. Dunstable's brother was a real paratrooper who'd died winning a medal at Arnhem, and it made PC Dunstable see red, no pun intended, when Penny swaggered about in a beret that color, pretending to be a war hero.

"Sergeant Argent was dead straight if big-headed, he'd never set anyone up. But in court once—some silly business about pinching ashtrays from a pub—Phil Penny swore that Argent had planted the evidence on him. Sheer, childish spite on impulse, nobody believed it for a moment. All the same, it rankled with Ronnie. He said he'd wring the Bad Penny's neck—the way one does after a few pints.

"Last of the three was Inspector Hector. He had a retarded daughter, a sweet kid called Belinda. Aged sixteen, mental age maybe half that. Belinda wandered away from her mum and dad in Jubilee Park one afternoon, and when Colin Hector found her she was being chatted-up and treated to ice cream by Phil Penny. Hector did his nut—went berserk and chased Penny for a mile or more. Penny only got away because he felt he was running for his life. Possibly he was.

"Colin Hector knew Phil Penny trusted me. 'Tell your friend he's safe, I shan't do anything now I know Belinda's all right,' he said to me. 'Just make sure he stays out of my way. And if he so much

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as speaks to my daughter again, I'll—' Hector didn't say what, what he'd like to do being obvious."

Mr. Slatter broods a while. "Yes, Phil Penny was worthless, rest his soul. But he more than paid for it all on Charter Day."

Squadron Leader Jumbo Hedges, RAF, Ret'd., rose on the balls of his feet and smirked, "I seem to have started something, eh?"

Parsett Borough Council had hired Jumbo as its first tourism-and-entertainments officer. Jumbo was dynamic and, in a good cause, unscrupulous. Charter Day was his invention. Parsett had been granted a royal charter in medieval times and Jumbo Hedges had decided that, traditionally, the anniversary was celebrated in a big way. Which was news to local historians. "Of course it's totally bogus or thereabouts," Jumbo countered patiently, "but it will bring the trippers in."

He wasn't wrong. Among Charter Day events were a pageant, a carnival, sports, country dancing, and a contest to select Miss Parsett Charter 1947. The place was thronged. "Oh, you've started something," Slatter agreed ruefully. "Traffic jams, public drunkenness and disorder, and a pal of mine at the Yard tells me half the pickpockets in South London caught the 10:20 A.M. express from Victoria—they should be arriving any minute."

"Bad show," Jumbo murmured, but contrition was brief. "Still, even crooks have to buy beer and sandwiches—it's all good for business. Even yours, if you catch a few."

"Thanks," said Slatter. They were outside the Corn Exchange building with its Georgian pillars and gilded weathercock, staring down the ski-slope of High Street. For the first time in Slatter's experience, the entire half mile was thick with people who spilt into the roadway so that cars were nosing through a human sea.

All police leave had been canceled for the day, so it was hardly surprising that during the next six hours Slatter should encounter all three of The Rhyming Coppers, and many more besides. Ronnie Argent, sweatily excited, shouldered across the street about 2:00 P.M. to say, "That little bastard Phil Penny's about. I'll *have* him, you'll see!"

"Simmer down, don't be daft," Slatter advised, but then a motor coach ran into a carnival float—at less than walking pace, there were no injuries and hardly any damage, but considerable ill feeling—and Argent hurried away.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Toward twilight, crowds were thinning and Slatter's feet ached. He'd been trawling the High Street area, uncertain of what he was looking for yet confident of knowing it when it appeared. The philosophy had netted him a pickpocket and a brace of prostitutes trying a spot of diversification by stealing from unlocked cars. He'd also broken up a fight, directed five people to the bus station, and walked a blind man nearly a mile to the same destination.

Sitting on a traffic bollard at the bottom of High Street, defiantly and brazenly smoking a pipe, he let his brain idle in neutral gear. Ten minutes earlier he'd nodded to PC Dunstable. Five minutes from now he was due to meet Inspector Hector for an informal exchange of notes. He wasn't looking for trouble.

Behind High Street, reached by a cobblestoned path between a surviving stub of castle wall and the coaching inn built in its shadow, was a mad jumble of lanes and culs-de-sac known as The Yards. Slatter happened to be facing that entry when a man emerged—only to turn on his heel and dart back.

Slatter had witnessed such sudden retreats a hundred times. Evidently the man had recognized him, by job if not name, and wanted no closer contact. Ironically, Slatter hadn't recognized the man in return—but for that abrupt change of direction he wouldn't have seen him at all, in any meaningful sense. If the man had kept going, he'd have been safe.

But he hadn't, and Slatter dashed across High Street in pursuit. The moment he plunged into The Yards, Slatter realized he was defeated. There were still crowds in here, browsing at craft stalls or sipping weak tea and weaker lemonade from a temporary canteen set up by ladies of the W.V.S.

While he hovered, something eerie began to take place. This passage into The Yards sounded even noisier than it was, thanks to the confined space, but shouts and screams broke out at the far end, cutting off suddenly so that silence rippled down toward the detective. Then the crowd started parting, pressing back.

When the Bad Penny appeared, there was a nightmarish suggestion that he was running the gauntlet. Not that he was running —"More like falling from foot to foot," Slatter recalls. He only knew Penny from that notorious maroon beret—and even that was wrong somehow. Its color seemed to be staining most of Phil Penny's face.

Penny dived forward as Slatter made to intercept him and hit the cobblestones as if surrendering to a feather bed. In the moment of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kneeling beside him, Slatter heard a man behind say, "Poor chap's had it, gone for a Burton."

The man was wrong, but only just. Already a lot of blood had escaped from the Bad Penny's ear, pooling on the stones, and his mouth was filling with it.

He looked up into Slatter's eyes. Distorted, indistinct, he gargled, "Copper got me—" His eyes were desperate with the need to convey information. "*Rhy*—" he insisted, gargling, drowning "cop—" Then he was finished, gone, only the corpse remained.

One of ours, thought Slatter, numbed and sick with shock. My God, one of them murdered him.

Glancing up as a shadow fell on him, he found Inspector Hector, breathing hard, forehead dewy in the stuffy closeness of The Yards. "So it *was* Penny," Hector muttered. "I thought he went by me just now."

Slatter felt as if he was underwater, his voice didn't sound right. Inspector Hector, dapper as ever in silvery slacks, dark blazer and white shirt, was only inches away. Slatter heard himself say: "Sir, there's blood on your sleeve. Fresh blood."

Colin Hector blinked and licked his upper lip. "He must have brushed past me back there. Bleeding like a stuck pig, right?"

Slatter stood up, wondering confusedly how so much blood could [illegible] with that sense of inevitability and lack of surprise found in bad dreams, he noted that other policemen who must have been nearby were already controlling the crowd.

They were Sergeant Argent and Constable Dunstable.

Rumor went crazy in Parsett. One of the volunteer tea ladies, a former Army nurse, had been leaning close when Penny spoke and spent the rest of the evening broadcasting what she had heard. Soon after sunset, hundreds of people "knew" that the police—*a* policeman at least—had been condemned out of the victim's mouth. By midnight, hardly a citizen was unaware of the tale.

"Folk who'd have refused to give Phil Penny so much as a light for his cigarette hadn't a bad word to say about him all of a sudden. Times like that, 'Speak no ill of the dead' gets out of control," Mr. Slatter observes sardonically.

"The whiter the Bad Penny got painted, the blacker *we* were tarred. There were two rival rumors, both rotten: either the three

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rhyming Coppers had cornered Phil Penny in a back alley, or one of them did while the rest kept watch.

"It was a very bad and dangerous situation. To make clear there was no question of covering up, the Chief Constable called in the Metropolitan Police, the Murder Squad, immediately. The Rhyming Coppers weren't suspended officially, merely advised to take time off, stay at home, and hold themselves available.

"But that first evening, all three denied any knowledge of Penny's death. Colin Hector claimed to have been taking a shortcut through The Yards to meet me farther down High Street. PC Dunstable claimed to have been on his way back to the police station after duty on the carnival route, when he stopped in The Yards for a free cup of W.V.S. tea and 'a stroll around.' Ronnie Argent said he'd been patrolling The Yards because it was one of the last locations still congested with people, where he might be needed.

"What made it worse was the post mortem, because the sawbones reported that Phil Penny had been struck repeatedly with a cylindrical weapon—hard, smooth, and fairly heavy. Yes, that calls to mind what the layman calls a truncheon—a staff, to us in the trade. In my day, plainclothesmen carried a smaller version, and of course the uniformed boys had them. *All* staffs were checked, without result. The significance remained that the post-mortem findings backed up the Bad Penny's dying accusation."

At this point, Mr. Slatter cracks his knuckles and growls, "See how a silly, so-called harmless joke was working? Leading us by the noses, just because a daft old drunk had strung three names together and 'Rhyming Coppers' was on our brains."

Slatter couldn't sleep that night. His tired mind kept nagging that if Phil Penny hadn't invested his last moments choking out a dying message nobody would have suspected Hector, Argent, or Dunstable.

Certainly the three men had disliked him, and with reason, but no more so than perhaps a majority of their colleagues. Never mind policemen, the Bad Penny had been in many a civilian's bad books, from Winchelsea to the Surrey border. Moreover, The Rhyming Coppers' overt motives, inflated in rumors, hardly bore examination. Colin Hector's temper might be volcanic, but he'd erupted on catching Penny flirting with his child, that rage had scared the fellow away, and therefore Inspector Hector had no apparent reason to kill Phil Penny.

Sergeant Argent had threatened to get Penny, but Slatter knew Argent well enough to understand that he'd meant a justified arrest,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not a frenzy of violence. And PC Dunstable was an even tamer version of Argent—he'd argued hotly with the Bad Penny but never showed signs of laying hands on him.

Round and round it went, Slatter excruciatingly aware that his subconscious, far from posing a maddening, circular riddle, was attempting to tell him something. He finally fell asleep without warning, waking with a thundering headache and an almost awed realization of what his mind had been urging him to consider. It took him all of seven minutes to wash and shave. Then he ran to Parsett Old Town police station where Chief Inspector Cyril McWray, the Scotland Yard man, was holding court.

"Life's very unfair on women," McWray lectured. "Chap cheats on his wife, he's a jolly dog, and his mates close ranks and lie their heads off to cover for him. Let a wife do it and there's a torrent of testimony against the wicked slut. Very useful for us—I hope human nature never changes." Chief Inspector McWray was a moon-faced man with an absurd rosebud mouth lost in the well-shaved expanse and perpetually pursing over some sly inward jest.

At Slatter's urging, McWray and his aide, Sergeant Crane, had spent a morning at a little town hardly half an hour's drive from Parsett. Slatter considered that if Chief Inspector McWray ever needed a new job, he'd make a fortune selling freezers to Eskimos, the man was a charmer, a natural gossip easing strangers into matching him.

After a lot of chatting, they'd drawn their first blank at a certain Gerald George's workplace. Gerald George, they were informed, had finished night duty some hours before and should be found at home—asleep most likely.

He proved to be at home but not asleep. When McWray and Slatter pushed the drab brick cottage's front gate open, an upstairs curtain twitched like a guilty nerve and McWray started humming under his breath.

A woman was in the garden, hanging out washing. The first thing Slatter noticed was her bosom, pouting splendidly in a too-tight sweater. Belatedly shifting attention to her face, he saw an equally splendid black eye, shades ranging from mauve to green.

McWray leered gallantly, sweeping off his trilby. Black eye and all, she returned him a practiced look, shaking a rather greasy cascade of curls and shifting into profile for the visitors. Behind her, the front door crashed open, disclosing a stocky man in blue-black-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

serge uniform trousers and not much else. Sun in his eyes, he bellowed, "Saucy cow, I'll learn you to bring your fancy man here in broad dayli—" Words stopped, his throat clicked. The sun was behind a cloud, letting him make out the police car beyond the privet hedge and Chief Inspector McWray's watchful and official aura.

A shock, tiny yet galvanic, prickled across Slatter's skin. *One shoulder slightly higher than the other, and the way he carries his head . . .* It was his stance and outline, not Gerald George's features, that Slatter recognized as those of the man he'd seen for an instant the previous afternoon.

He said: "You shouldn't have run off yesterday, Mr. George. I only wanted a word with you. I still do."

"Me? I never left the house yesterday, at least not till starting work. Ask her."

Mrs. George went on pleating a wet bedsheet, bruises starker from her pallor, her shoulders drooping. She didn't look at anyone and might not have heard.

McWray addressed Slatter. "You were right about him, son. We've got a live one here." His dreadful little mouth sucked an invisible sweet. He beamed at Gerald George. "If you were a real copper, pal, you might stand a cat's chance in hell. As it is, you won't have got rid of all the blood, so you're done for."

Conversational, verging on gloating, his tone escaped threats. But it worked on Gerald George, who made a mutely damning admission by running for it, around the corner of the cottage. Slatter pelted after him. McWray didn't stir: he was grossly out of condition, hated to sweat, and he'd sent Sergeant Crane to watch the back of the property before pulling up at the front gate.

Neatly fielded by Crane, George didn't fight. Possibly because his truncheon had been left upstairs in the bedroom along with the rest of his gear. As McWray had predicted, blood of Phil Penny's type lingered in the groove for the truncheon's retaining loop, with traces on the leather thong itself. Confronted with that, and testimony from neighbors, Gerald George confessed.

"He was a copper, too—of sorts," Mr. Slatter explains. "Factory policeman, glorified night watchman. He lived at Rye, which was why we went there looking for somebody fitting that general description. As the poor old Bad Penny intended from the start. But Wimble's little joke had in effect brainwashed us in advance, turned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

everything upside down. That's what came to me in the night—how crazy it was.

"I woke up next morning, kicking myself. Him seeming to name a Rhyming Copper *cleared* Inspector Hector and the rest, it had to! Yes, they'd disliked him and vice versa, that's why they were cleared. Think about it: it's hard to hate somebody anonymous, you need to know them. The Bad Penny knew them, therefore he knew the most obvious, basic facts about them—their names.

"Now life's very melodramatic and murder victims really do try to say who did it. Phil Penny did his level best—so why in the world had he used a nickname shared by three different men? I mean, conspiracy was out of the question. Hector was too bright to risk ganging up with Argent and Dunstable, and it wasn't in their natures, anyway.

"So why hadn't Penny said Argent or Dunstable or Hector? Why, indeed. Which led to me catching on that he couldn't have been trying to say Rhyming Copper at all.

"All right, what *had* the Bad Penny said? Something close to 'Rhy copper.' Then I remembered him having bother with a jealous husband at Rye. Supposing it was *Rye* copper?

"Chief Inspector McMurray was willing to give it a go. At any local nick, there's a vast body of background information that never gets put in evidence. Rye police recalled being sent to sort out a domestic dispute involving a copper, Gerald George, and his wife, and some outsider.

"Then we had a chat with George's neighbors. They remembered her affair with a chap from Parsett. Mrs. G. had been what you might term chastened for a long while after. But yes, lately she'd taken to entertaining gentlemen friends when her husband's back was turned. There had been a terrible to-do about a week before—shouts and screams and some bloke running away in the middle of the night when Mr. George nipped back from work unexpectedly. Obviously, the woman had taken up with Phil Penny again and her husband beat the truth out of her and went looking for Penny in Parsett on Charter Day.

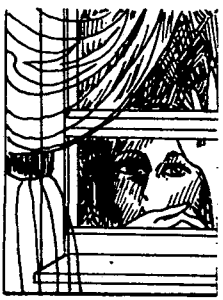
"And caught up with him in a quiet spot at The Yards, out of sight of the crowds nearer the High Street.

"It all hinged on knowledge, in a way. Phil Penny had romanced so many women, I daresay their last names were a blur. Mrs. George would have been Molly or Polly to him, and, dying, the best he could manage for her old man was 'Rye copper.' "

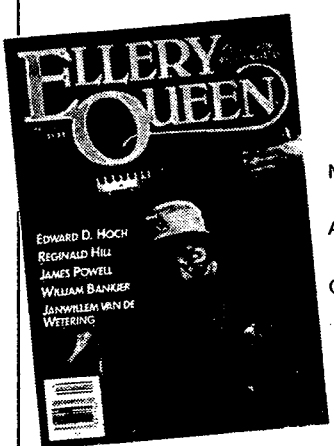
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Slatter clears his throat sternly. "Human nature's funny. Hector, Argent, and Dunstable were less grateful to me than I expected. They took the suspicion very hard, and I could tell all three of 'em felt I should never have made the initial mistake. The fact that I was the first of their colleagues to think again and do something about it didn't count. There was a Distinct Atmosphere ever afterward. I was glad to get posted away to Guildford."

His sense of humor being minimal, Mr. Slatter isn't essaying irony when he adds grumpily, "The whole damned thing was beyond a joke."



A special offer for mystery fans...



12 issues of Ellery Queen for only $15.97
(Save 24% off the regular newsstand price)

☐ Payment enclosed ☐ Bill me
☐ Please renew my current subscription

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State____ Zip_____

For Immediate Subscription Service Call **TOLL FREE 1-800-247-2160** (in IOWA 1-800-362-2860).

Outside US and Poss. $19.20 (cash with order US funds).

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for your first issue.

DQJ6Q

☐ ALSO, SEND 12 ISSUES OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK FOR $15.97 (OUTSIDE US AND POSSESSIONS $19.97) WE'LL BILL YOU LATER.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a ***NEW*** short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

"I'm not into violence," Don told her.

She said sharp, "What does that mean?"

"I just, uh, thought I'd mention it. That I'm not violent."

Don drove six–eight blocks, feeling Joan's gaze on him. Then she said calmly, "Don't worry about it. Things will work out."

Another stylish, substantial, altogether special story from Robert Twohy, whose "Yellow One-Eyed Cat" in the May 1985 issue won him another Edgar nomination from the Mystery Writers of America and whose "Narc in Love" in the June 1985 issue has just won the Mystery Readers of America's first Macavity for best mystery short story of 1985! . . .

GOING FOR DESTINY

by ROBERT TWOHY

Soft brown hair, big blue eyes, on the chubby side. I had dreams about her. Who wouldn't dream of the boss's wife if she's young and desirable?

Keane wasn't really my boss. He was head of the History Department and I was a gardener, tending the grounds around the Social Studies Building. He had nothing to do with me and didn't even know me. None of the department heads or professors knew me. Why should they? Their minds were full of important stuff, which I'm not.

I'd see her coming or going, with him or alone, and wonder how a bony coot with a long nose and a mean, tight mouth could have got a plump, pretty package like her. None of my business, but I'd wonder.

© 1986 by Robert Twohy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A month ago, early September, a Tuesday morning. I was driving my '77 Pinto north on El Camino at the usual early hour and WHANGO!—blowout, right front. A bad beginning for a day but it could be worse—I was a few yards from a parking lot with plenty of spaces. I lumped in and for a quarter bought no towaway worries. I stood at the curb with my thumb out and a sincere look.

Not much traffic before 6:00 A.M. Half a dozen cars snorted by, then a dark-blue Ford pulled up twenty yards north. I hopped in, babbling thanks.

Round face, bright blue eyes— "Hey, Mrs. Keane."

"The gardener—what was your name?"

"Dan Talbott. I had a blowout. My good luck you came by."

"Maybe mine, too." Just a murmur, which I decided I must have heard wrong.

She got going toward campus. She said she'd been for an early-morning drive and was on her way home. "You have nice eyes." I heard that clear. I didn't say anything.

"Do you know a blush is attractive?"

We were near the north turn to the campus and she had eased into the right lane. I said to drop me and I'd walk the rest of the way.

"I'm turning. We live on Torrey Lane." Which is where senior faculty with clout lease old-style two-story houses on big fenced lots. There's a long waiting list for when a resident retires or dies.

She made the turn and we started down Quad Drive leading to the main buildings. She asked, did I like being a gardener?

I said it was okay and kept talking, not like me. I said how I'd been at San Mateo College studying computer science but dropped out and got a job with a gardener and learned basics, and when I was laid off I was sent by the job agency to the university—they hired me and I'd been here three years. She'd asked if I liked gardening and got my complete job history.

I finally shut up and she asked, how old was I? Twenty-four. "You don't wear a wedding ring." —Not married. "Do you take girls out?" —Sure. "Any particular girl?" —No. "You certainly blush easily." Certainly did.

"You don't look like a man who'd brag about his love affairs."

I went hnn-hnn-hnn, a laugh if you can call it that, more like I'm trying to get something out my nose. I don't like it, but when I'm nervous I do it. I was nervous. She threw me a glance and I had a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shaky feeling like when you're on the edge of a deep place. I looked at my hands on my leg.

She turned right on Palaldo Avenue, the main campus street. I said, "Let me off anywhere," the Social Studies Building being a block or so north and across the avenue.

Entrance to the big parking lot was to our right. She cut in sharp and I fell on her. My left arm was around her and my right hand had gone right where she was softest. She murmured, "My, my."

I said, "Excuse me," trying to pull back, but no way as we were still in the swerve. She swerved left and I fell off her into the door.

She said, "Was that fun?"

Yes and no. I didn't know what she was up to.

She traveled along a row of cars parked diagonal. "Just let me off anywhere, Mrs. Keane." She slid into an empty space. "Thanks a lot."

I reached for the door and her hand came down on my knee.

She said in a throaty voice, "We can't part like this—not with your face all aflame. Nobody's watching, but what if they were? What would they think?"

"I dunno what you mean, Mrs. Keane."

"Joan. Can you say Joan?" Her hand was working up my leg. I could have slid out from under but didn't.

"Joan."

"And you're Dan. Joan and Dan. Why am I being silly? Young professors proposition me and I tell them no. Eight years of marriage and no affairs. Is it time, Dan?"

"I, uh, I—"

"You're twenty-four, I'm thirty-one, he's fifty-nine. Have you wondered why I married him?"

"I, uh, I really got to, uh—it's past six."

"Yes." She laid off my leg, squared up behind the wheel, and said in a low voice, "Friday nights he goes to the City, to Historical Society meetings. Next Friday at eight P.M. I'll be in the lot by the train depot in Redwood. Don't say anything, come or don't."

I walked into a parked car, around it, and across Palaldo, feeling a hot spot on the back of my neck that could be her eyes, and headed around the Social Studies Building for the gardener's shack in back. I was a long time between affairs, not true, I'd never had one and had had dreams of her. She had turned down sharp young professors and was propositioning me, the gardener—or was she? Was she playing me for a sucker, for no reason except her own amusement,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

no intention of keeping the appointment? I didn't know, and wouldn't until Friday, at 8:00 P.M. in the S.P. parking lot in Redwood.

She got out of the Ford. A ratty old grey coat made her shapeless, a floppy grey hat hid most of her face. Black-rimmed glasses with smudges blurred her bright eyes. She wore no makeup. I wouldn't have recognized her and guessed that was her idea, not to be recognized.

She had me drive to Coyote Point, ten miles north, and park in the big open area there, mostly empty, the bay spread out for us. A clear, cold night, not much moon. She took off the hat and glasses but left the coat on. She lay her head back and closed her eyes and smiled and shortly we were lip-level. A while more and my hands were inside her coat. She twisted away and said, "No—not here and not now. I want our affair to mean something. I won't be just one of your easy conquests."

I started to go hnn-hnn, but cut it off. She said, "This is a time for talk. I want you to know things about me—like why I married Keane, and what kind of marriage it is."

That wasn't what I had come for. But I'm non-aggressive, and wasn't about to start wrestling with a department head's wife. She settled back in her seat and motioned that I do the same. "Nine years ago, nineteen seventy-seven, he was brought into University Hospital almost dead. A crazed student turned down for the History MA program had burst into his office and battered him with a pipewrench—I was one of his nurses."

She said that a man tweaked from the jaws of death often falls for his pretty nurse. Keane fell hard, proposed. She said no—she was twenty-two and from records knew he was fifty. "He said he wanted me so much he was going to tell me something no one else knew—"

Which was that three years before, he had inherited the family fortune that had begun with a Nevada silver strike a hundred years before and compounded through the years. He had kept it quiet—if word got around, as a world-class scholar he'd be hounded by do-good outfits from every continent. He said that on retirement he'd slip away to Greece or Switzerland or someplace and begin a new life devoted to pleasure—he hoped she'd be with him as his wife.

She asked, why not retire right now? He said no, to become head of the history department at this university had been his life's ambition and in a few years he'd achieve it. He wanted to reign a while

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as top dog, lording it over those who had slighted and sneered at him. At sixty he'd retire—that was his pledge.

"He said that when he died I'd inherit his fortune. But there was something creepy about him—I didn't know what. I think I'd have turned him down if it wasn't for Kate."

—Her older sister, married and living in Jose. "She said, don't be a fool, grab him—but first get it solid that he really has the money."

"Did you find out what was creepy?"

"Yes. So will you." She had a tight little smile. "I'll get to it."

—She put it to Keane that she wanted proof he was rich. He called his lawyer, Marvin Benchard, in the City.

"Benchard's his lawyer?" I'd read of him in the paper sometimes—one of the heavies.

She nodded. "Next day a man from his office came to the hospital and showed me documents that spelled out that three years before, Keane had inherited stocks and other stuff totaling eleven million plus." The documents also verified that Keane was last of his line, had never married, no one had claims on him, and he'd never made a will.

Two weeks later, Keane, now up and around, took her to Benchard's office on Montgomery and signed a will naming her as sole heiress of the Keane fortune on his death, Benchard as executor. The lawyer put the will in his safe. A month later she became Mrs. Douglas Keane.

She was quiet. I asked, "What was creepy?"

She turned away from me. "Hold up my coat."

"What do you mean?"

"So you can see." She was rolling up the green sweater underneath.

I held the coat up and to the side, and in the thin moonlight saw across her white back long red stripes—some sharp and clear, some faint, a few puffed and scaly. I swallowed, mumbled something, put fingertips to a puffed place and felt heat.

She rolled the sweater down and got the coat back under her. The big eyes had a soft shine as she took my hand. "You're the only one but Kate I've ever showed them to. It's not my pleasure, believe me—strictly his."

I flashed on Keane's cold eyes, his tight and prissy mouth. Who can guess what a guy's like with his wife behind closed doors?

She let go my hand, ran fingers through her soft hair. "Not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

often—every month or so, when the mood hits him." She had the tight smile. "His little peculiarity."

I commented that some of the marks looked recent—and I had felt heat. She murmured, "A week ago was the last time."

I said she didn't have to put up with it. She could—

"Divorce him?" Same smile. "I don't seem to get around to it. Kate says I'd get a nice settlement but nothing like if the will's in effect when he dies. She pointed out that eleven million invested keeps growing, and right now I'd inherit maybe twenty million."

"You mean if he died right now."

"That's what I mean." She cocked her head and I got it that the bright eyes were telling me something—or asking me something.

I got a chilly feeling that was fear, also excitement. I didn't know—I might be reading her wrong, what I thought I saw in her eyes could be all in my head.

She had murmured something. I came in on the last word, 'charged.' "Say again?"

"The student wasn't charged."

"The student?"

"His father was a VIP, and a big contributor to the university. He was sent away somewhere."

"The guy that beat on Keane?"

"Yes. Scott Haley. He'd be about thirty now. Tall, six-four or more. He'd wear about size twelve shoes." That last part was like to herself. She gave a quick jump, looked at her watch. "After nine. Time to get back."

I drove south on 101 with thoughts bouncing around—sister Kate, Keane who liked whips, Scott Haley with size twelve shoes, eleven million that could now be twenty million. Turning on Whipple, I said, "I'm, uh, not into violence."

She said sharp, "What does that mean?"

"I just, uh, thought I'd mention it. That I'm not violent."

I drove six–eight blocks, feeling her gaze on me. Then she said calmly, "Don't worry about it. Things will work out."

I pulled into the S.P. lot. She had put on the hat and glasses before we'd left the Point. "I'll be here Friday, same time." She patted my hand on the wheel, slid out, trotted fast to the Ford. As she got in, the hat came off, and the glasses, and, after a few heaves and wiggles, the coat, all going into the space behind the far seat.

Then Joan Keane, who anyone who knew her would recognize, backed the Ford out of its slot and drove away, not looking at a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gardener in a beat-up red Pinto who sat and watched her with an unsteady feeling inside, like on the edge of a deep place.

Tuesday, Keane came up the walk and didn't see me crouched with a pair of clippers. Other intellectuals came and went, some nodding or signifying in some way that I sort of existed.

Thursday, I saw Joan walking with Keane from the building. I was a ways away, trimming around a tree. She looked my way and gave a small nod like a department head's wife might. I gave her one back like a gardener might.

Friday night she wore the same coat, hat, and smudged glasses. She had me drive to Redwood Harbor. I parked in some trees and kissed her, not lingering on it because I wanted to get her talking where she had left off.

She didn't say anything for a while, gazing ahead, profiled eye with that wide, somewhat blank look. Then, quiet voice, "Years ago Kate was a nude dancer. Nobody knows that, her husband doesn't know. He's a dentist, they have a nice home on the west side, two small children. Twenty years ago in Vegas, she lived with a man named Owen DeMario, a gangster with connections in Cleveland. So he had hinted. Now he owns one of the big casinos, The Hereafter. She's kept in contact with him through the years—they're not lovers, he's old now, but there's a fondness, and she calls him at times and he tries to help her with her problems."

I didn't know where this was leading but kept quiet.

"I saw Kate last Tuesday. I told her about you and that I thought you would help us but you wouldn't do violence."

Her eyes were steady on mine. I got that rocky feeling, that I might fall in. "Kate asked was I ready to go ahead and I said yes. She said, No more putting it off? I said no, now was the time.

"She picked up the phone, dialed DeMario, talked low. She hung up and told me he would send a man, who would call her next week. Kate and I will meet him, lay out the plan, and work out arrangements."

I was at least two thoughts behind. "DeMario's sending a man—"

"A professional." I was going to fall into her deep eyes, I knew it, they were pulling me. She said, "Do we have a destiny? Say it."

"Say what?"

"Destiny."

Over the edge and into the depths, go with the current past a dead body snagged on a water's-edge branch, swim with her to a sun-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

splashed shore of Greece, or the shore of a cold lake in Switzerland. "Destiny."

She sighed, leaned back, took my hand. "We're together, then. I knew we would be. We go together from here."

She laid out what was going to happen.

Late at night, a date not settled but soon, she would be off somewhere, a movie or something, with a woman friend. Keane would be home alone in his study, which was also his bedroom, asleep or working on his history stuff. Kate would be home in San Jose with her family.

DeMario's man would let himself in the front door with the dupe key Joan would give him when they met, which would be next week after he'd called Kate. He'd go upstairs, shoot Keane, leave the gun on the bed, and go.

"Why leave the gun on the bed?"

"For you to bury, with the gloves, after you write on the wall. With chocolate syrup."

I went hnn-hnn-hnn.

She said coldly, "Stop that." I did. "Do you think I'm joking?" No. "A red crayon, or spray paint, are commonplace. We want something to stir up the press and TV."

"You want the, uh, press—"

"Let me go on, it'll get clear. You'll get to the house a half hour after the man. He'll be long gone, on his way back to Vegas, you'll never see him. You'll go in the back way. Our house is tenth from the north end of Torrey, on the west side of the street—a yellow gate's at the back. Go in and immediately right is a dug-up flowerplot. A pair of big shoes, size twelve or thereabouts, will be in it. In them will be a pair of gloves, a flashlight, and a small can of chocolate syrup with a pull-top. Put on the shoes and the gloves and leave your own shoes in the flowerplot. Go up across the lawn with the other things to the house. I'll have broken a cellar window that day with a rock that'll be near. Reach in and up, pull the catch, open the window, and let yourself down into the cellar. Are you with me so far?"

I said yes. She went on that I'd go up the cellar steps and the door at top would be locked. I'd go back down and to the left I'd see a row of shelves with tools spread out, including a crowbar. I'd take it and go back up and jimmy the door. It was old and warped, she said, easy to rip open at the lock.

"Why two trips? Why not grab the crowbar right off?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Because details are what count. The killer's never been in the house, wouldn't know there's a locked door. He goes back to get a tool to spring it. The cellar floor is dirty and greasy—footprints will show what he did."

I nodded that I was ready for more.

"Lay the crowbar on the top step and go in the house. There's a staircase across the hall. Go up. My bedroom is first door right, his is second. He'll be dead, in bed or at his desk or maybe on the floor. Go to the nearest wall, open the syrup can, dip your gloved fingers in, and write *this* in big strong letters—"

She held out a scrap of paper. On it was penciled DETH TO FALS PROFS.

I asked, did she want it spelled like that? Yes. She pocketed the scrap. "Cops can run lab tests, analyze the printing, compare it with stuff in their files, contact other police departments to see if *they* have any chocolate messages. Keep cops busy and they're happy."

Big shoes, footprints, DETH TO FALS PROFS. Nine years ago, Keane had been battered by a crazed student 6'4" or more with feet to scale. "Is the idea that Scott Haley came back to finish the job on Keane?"

"Yes, if he's dropped out of sight. If not, if he's in a mental ward somewhere, or dead, there are lots of students, present and past, who get turned down for grad programs or flunk out of the university who might get a hate on for the history department or professors in general."

"Not too many with size twelve feet."

"The cops will figure the killer could have any size feet, and could have worn big shoes to throw them off."

I shook my head. "When cops find out about your inheritance, they'll figure right off that you hired someone to kill Keane."

"Yes—but I'll have an alibi that night. And they won't find anything against me. No affairs, no marital problems. I've never talked about his little peculiarity. They'll suspect me but can't charge me without evidence."

I was quiet a while. "Why me? Why not just have the guy shoot Keane, period?"

"It would look too professional. Who would hire a professional but me? If I'm the only logical suspect, Benchard might be able to hold up the money. So we need a red herring, to leave a trail the press and TV will get excited about—crazed student prowling the campus, hating professors, anxious to leave a death message in chocolate,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

maybe not the first. What you're doing is creating another suspect, to take the focus off me."

It made sense, kind of. I had one more question—"Why not have the guy do it himself? I mean wear the big shoes, make the footprints, write the message?"

"Professionals don't do fiction, they do fact. *We* do the fiction. He's the technician, you're the illusionist."

"*You're* the illusionists—you and Kate. I'm the clown in big shoes."

She leaned on me. "Shakespeare used clowns in his murder plots—clowns are adorable." So was she, at that moment, soft all over, looking up at me with big shining eyes. She looked sixteen, not thirty-one. I kissed her.

She straightened up, back to business. "After you scrawl the message, leave the syrup can on his desk, and go out the back door. Bury the gun and the gloves in the flowerplot, how deep doesn't matter, they'll find them. Pull on your own shoes and take the big shoes, drive up to Skyline to the Vista Point, and pitch them down a gully in different directions. If they're found, it's all right—anyone could have pitched them."

"If cops stopped me and I had the shoes—"

"They won't. That's not our destiny."

I didn't know. But I was in the current, and it would take me wherever it went. I had seized the moment—or it had seized me.

I saw Keane three times the next week. If he saw me, I got no sign of it.

Friday night, Joan had me drive to the coast south of Half Moon, where I parked on a bluff. We kissed briefly. She said, "Next Tuesday."

DeMario's man had called. Last night Joan and Kate had met him at a lot near Pier 39. "Small and neat, polite, looks like an old-line waiter in a good restaurant. W. E. Plant—it's not his real name but his name for this job. He's registered at the St. Pierre in the City. I gave him the dupe for the front door. He'll use a cheap pistol like anyone can buy, that can't be traced. He says it won't make much noise, and houses on Torrey are set well apart. He'll get to the house at eleven, shoot Keane, and leave. You'll get to the back gate by eleven-thirty.

"I bought the shoes at the Goodwill in San Carlos, size twelves. In them will be a pair of cloth gloves, a can of chocolate syrup, and a flashlight I got at the supermarket. I was dressed like now and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nobody in either store will remember me. Go over what you're supposed to do."

During the week I'd browsed a map of the campus and gazed across a field at the back of Torrey Lane from the west. I told her where I'd park and what I'd do after that, all the things that she had told me to do. She nodded. I asked what she would do that night.

"Campus theater is playing two Garbo films, *Ninotchka* and *Camille*—starts at eight, lets out at eleven forty-five. I'll run into someone I know to sit with—if not, I'll chat with someone at coffee intermission and sit with her. A loose alibi's best—too careful and it shows."

"So you'll get home after twelve."

"Yes. I'll find Douglas's body, call the campus police, and inside five minutes they'll be all over the house and yard, finding clues."

That was it. We were set. She reached for my hand and we sat quiet, thinking thoughts, looking at the sluggish dark sea.

Starrfish Drive comes in from El Camino. Torrey Lane is a finger coming off it to the north, green fields and trees lying east and west.

Running behind all the properties on the west side is a six-foot-high fence, with a back gate for each property.

At 11:10 Tuesday night, I drove south on Palaldo to Starrfish, to a parking lot serving the block of apartments on that corner. I wore my big winter jacket with a furry hood, right gear for this cold, clear night. In a pocket I had a folded paper bag to carry the big shoes away.

Two hundred feet north on Palaldo is a grove of trees. I strolled through it and beyond is the grassy field west of Torrey. No other strollers were in sight. I crossed the field, glancing around and behind, and saw no one.

I had slanted south so that when I got to the long fence I was near the tenth gate from the north end, pale-yellow. Reaching over, I lifted a hook and a second later was in Keane's back yard. If anyone was glancing out a rear second-floor window either side, I could be spotted—chances you take when going for destiny.

In the flowerplot to my right lay a pair of big, worn black shoes. I got down, pulled off my loafers, and took a pair of rolled-up cotton gloves and a stubby flashlight from one shoe and a small dark-brown can from the other. Slipping the light and the can into jacket pockets, I pulled on the gloves, shoved into the big shoes, left my loafers, and shambled across a raggedy lawn to the house.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Three windows at lawn level, middle one broken. On my knees, I reached in and up, hooked a metal loop, and pulled. The window fell inward with a soft crash of frame against plaster. Off to the right a dog whoofed. I stayed still. He did it two more times, then stopped. I sat, put big feet in the window, ooched my butt in, turned and grabbed the lower frame both hands, dangled a second, then dropped two feet to the cement floor inside.

Leaking light through my fingers, I crossed dirty cement to a flight of steps. I did the two trips up, and inside a minute I was in the house.

A low-watt light showed a stairway across a hall. I went up, glancing back to see some nice footprints on the green rug. At the second door right, I took the knob and for the first time that night felt a chill. In a second, I'd be focusing on dead Dr. Keane.

I told myself, this is Joan and Kate's idea, not mine—W. E. Plant's doing, not mine. I was the comedy turn after the main act, closing out the evening. I opened the door.

A lamp showed him at a desk with his bald head down on a book and arms hanging. He wore a dressing jacket, pants, shoes. Plant had slid in behind him and, absorbed in his bookwork, he probably didn't know he was being murdered before he was. A little blood was on the book, not much. I didn't look for a wound, not my job. On the bed lay a black, short-nosed pistol.

I went to the pale wall by the desk, zip-topped the can, and with left fingers printed in big sloppy chocolate letters, DETH TO FALS PROFS.

—Some blotches and drips, but it had a real look, like the work of a crazed student or former student who didn't care about slop or spelling if his statement was clear. The press and TV should go for it. I set the can on the desk.

My watch said 11:41. I'd been in the house six to eight minutes. Now left was to bury the things in the flowerplot, slide the big shoes into the bag I'd brought, slip on my loafers, drive to Skyline, get rid of the shoes, and go home.

I was four steps down when a door slammed at the front and quick heels sounded. Joan's voice, chipper—"Go in the living room, I'll put on coffee."

Another woman—"Too close to bedtime. I'd like a glass of milk if you have it."

11:42 and Joan was home and someone was with her. Kate? But she was supposed to be home in San Jose with her family.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joan bounced into view—nice hairdo, makeup, dark skirt and bundly jacket, nothing on her mind but coffee and milk if she had it. She raised her round face and stared up at me blank-eyed. I gestured like *clue me what's happening!*

"My God, there's a man on the stairs—gun in his hand! Out, Hazel, out-out, run-run!"

Not in hand but in pocket. Hazel who? Joan had whirled and fled. Hazel had fled—they were out in front of the house screaming, "Man with a gun, help! Call police! Help, call the cops, help!"

Joan was home early with Hazel. I was ten steps away from a dead department head with the murder gun in my pocket, wearing chocolate-covered gloves and size twelve shoes. The original scenario was canceled and I didn't know the new one. Time to be on my way.

Screams and shouts, not just Joan and Hazel now. Cops would be arriving in a hurry. I was down the stairs and stumbling along the hall into a kitchen. I spotted a back door and tried to turn but the big shoes kept going. I went down, got up and out the door, across the raggedy yard toward the gate. From the front, hysteria.

The gun flopped in my pocket. Pitch it somewhere, peel off the gloves. There were my loafers. A scream from the house —Joan?—"There he is at the gate! He has a gun!" A man's loud shout—"Police officer! Stop or I'll shoot!" I tossed the gun and one second later a sharp BANG, and a yell, "I'm shot!" Immediately came gunblasts that had to be at me. I dived and lay still except for chocolate paws waving. Time to surrender.

I was in a car full of cops. Then in seconds I was hauled out and run into a low adobe building which I guessed was the campus police department. Someone threw me at a chair, which folded. I was scooped up and thrown at another chair, which stayed up. Cops were staring at me with jubilant expressions. Someone said in a moderate voice, "Do you want to make a statement?" A small man in a grey suit sat at a desk I was in front of. On it were the gloves, the short-nosed gun, and the round brown can.

I said yes.

He said he was—I didn't get the name—a sergeant in the sheriff's department. He said I didn't have to make a statement, did I want a lawyer, anything I said could be used against me, etcetera. I said I'd make a statement.

The gun and other things were put in the desk and a small recorder

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was set up. I told everything that had happened and been said from the time she picked me up following my flat tire.

After that I got a shower, they took my clothes (including the big shoes) and gave me orange rompers, and put me in a cell by myself. I lay on a cot, my eyes slid shut, and I passed out.

A cop brought me a dog's breakfast on a tray. I drank the coffee and sat on the cot and thought of the events of last night as the morning passed.

The cop came with a wrapped baloney sandwich, a carton of milk, and more coffee and carried the breakfast out. I ate and drank and slept a while. The afternoon passed.

The grey man leaned on the wall. "Do you hate college professors because you flunked out of junior college? Did you hate Keane in particular because you lusted for his wife? Did you go into a rage at the unfairness of life?" All of this in a mild grey voice.

"No."

"Do you eat a lot of junk food?"

"Probably about average."

"Gloves and big shoes indicate premeditation—you knew what you were doing and intended not to be caught. So you'll be charged with first degree, probably—also attempt to murder the police officer."

"I threw the gun away and it fired."

"You shot off his left earlobe."

"Did I? Just a freak thing. I never shot a gun, I couldn't hit an officer in the earlobe on purpose. You're right that I knew what I was doing—I was the red herring, as I said in my statement."

"Nothing but lies."

"Whadoyou mean?"

"Joan Keane has no sister. Marvin Benchard never heard of Douglas Keane. Keane never inherited a silver fortune. Joan Keane will inherit books, furniture, a small bank account, and $100,000 death benefits. Las Vegas doesn't have a Hereafter club or a club owner named Owen DeMario and doesn't know anyone like W. E. Plant under any name. The St. Pierre has no recent guest of that name. Mrs. Keane says that she'd see you gardening and you'd look at her with an odd smile. She says she was never in your car."

"Like I said—the last four Fridays, when he was at Historical Society meetings in the City."

"No record of any Friday meetings in the City. She says that most Fridays he'd be in his room working on documents, and she'd watch

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TV or sometimes go to a movie. She described TV programs and two Friday movies she saw in the past month—and they all check out."

"Has she got a VCR? If you go over my car you'll find fingerprints or brown hair or something of hers."

"We did, and found nothing."

"Not one brown hair?"

"Nothing."

I was quiet, remembering how she had told me that details were what counted. They did. She had swamped me with details of Kate, Owen DeMario, and W. E. Plant, which wasn't his real name, so that I believed in them—and she had disposed of any detail that could incriminate her. Not one brown hair. "I suppose you checked Goodwill in San Carlos."

"We showed them photos of her. They didn't know her, the shoes, or the gloves."

"The grey coat, the floppy hat, the glasses—not in her car or anywhere else, huh?" He shook his head.

"How about my brown loafers in the flowerplot?"

"All they indicate is that you changed to the big shoes there."

"Which she left there for me. I had a folded bag in my jacket to carry them away."

"You could have brought them in the bag."

"Didn't."

He shrugged.

I got a flash and clapped my hands. "Whip scars! How would I know if she didn't show me?" He shook his head. I said, "No whip scars?" None. "You investigated her back?"

"She pulled up her blouse and showed me. No scars—just one cute little mole."

I had put fingertips to her savaged back and right away she had taken my hand and smoothed anything away. She hadn't been whipped, she'd been bodypainted. By who? Kate? No, there was no Kate. But someone had painted her, with a lot of skill, or skillful enough for me, in my Pinto in the moonlight. I had missed the cute little mole because it was painted out—she wouldn't neglect a detail like that. I thought a while. "Scott Haley?"

"No record of a former student of that name. Keane was never an in-patient at University Hospital and she was never a nurse there."

"Was she ever a nurse anywhere?"

"No. She was a grad student in psychology when she met Keane five years ago."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How old is she?"

"Thirty-eight."

"Did you check her movements last night?"

"Yes. She was at a concert at Redwood Auditorium with a friend, Hazel Crabbe, from eight until it closed at eleven-thirty. Keane died about eleven, as you know." So one thing she had told me was true.

I walked around. He leaned on the wall and his grey gaze followed me. I said, "She set me up with the gun. She hoped I'd get killed running away, which I would have if the cop wasn't a lousy shot. But she's still all right, because as my statement is just a string of lies you can't touch her, right?" Right, said his shrug.

"*I* didn't shoot Keane. Plant didn't under any name, Joan didn't, Scott Haley didn't—so I guess it was a secret lover. Figures—she told me she hadn't had a lover since marriage, meaning she did and still does."

"We've checked, and will check further, but—"

"Right. You won't find him, she's too careful. Try the art department, though, student or teacher. Those whip scars were good. The guy shot Keane and will get his share of the hundred thousand if she doesn't have him killed first."

I sat down. He said, "It looks like you're stuck with it all by yourself."

"Not exactly fair. I'm guilty, but she's more so—she and the other lover. I mean the lover. I wasn't a lover. All I got was a few kisses." And a glimpse of her plump back. "I was the clown."

He got off the wall. "It's possible. You seem the type it'd be fairly easy for a smart woman to sucker."

I am that type—make that *was*. Never again. Not for a long time, anyway.

My court-appointed lawyer said he could get me a deal, 25-to-life, if I confessed that I had shot Keane in a rage at his success and my nothingness—also because I lusted for his chubby little wife Joan, who I'd had dreams about. Twelve or fifteen years and I'd be out, if I was lucky.

I went for it, the alternative being straight life, no parole. So now I'm in Quentin.

Two things she told me were true: one, Keane would be shot about eleven that night, and two, she was my destiny.

Hnn-hnn-hnn.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKET

ELLERY QUEEN — published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is $3.20 per word — payable in advance — ($48.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SMU, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

SEND 25¢ for Large Listing of Mystery and Detective Books. Canford, Drawer 216E, Freeville, N.Y. 13068.

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

SCREENPLAYS! Learn How to Write like the Pros. Free Catalog! Script Warehouse, 2265 Westwood Blvd. #590I. Los Angeles, CA 90064.

VOLUME Books Used Hardcovers. Send for free catalogue. P.O. Box 8231, Mobile, AL 36689.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I. M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

MYSTERIES, THRILLERS. Used hardbacks and paperbacks. Write for free list. Time & Again Books, P.O. Box 13, Bedford, MA 01730.

FREE List used mysteries, hardbound, paperback $2 up. Mystery Mansion, 915 N. Combee, Lakeland, FL 33801.

USED Paperbacks By Mail. Mysteries, Thrillers, Suspense, Intrigue. Catalog Free! Royal Mysteries, 239 North Collier, Marco, FL 33937 Dept. EQ.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

SHERLOCK HOLMES books on audio cassettes. FREE catalog. Westlake House, 31220 LaBaya #110, Westlake Village, CA 91362.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

$1,000 Weekly Home Business Directory. Free Details. Name and address to: Box 1610-DP Darien, Connecticut, 06820-1610.

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60559.

$5,000 A Week 30 day Double. Guarantee $2.00 Refundable. NWP, 3518 East Avenue T-2, Palmdale, CA 93550.

TAKE PICTURES for profit. Try our unique methods. Write: Photomoney 14589H West 32nd, Golden, CO 80401.

"$1,000's WEEKLY!" MAILING LETTERS! FANTASTIC OPPORTUNITY! EXCITING FREE DETAIL$! START IMMEDIATELY! WRITE: $UCCESS, #605-DPG, DRESHER, PA 19025.

HUNDREDS WEEKLY Home Mailing Program. Free Details. MMI-U, Box 339, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055.

WANT TO GET RICH? Plan Revealed Secret Formula! Free Report: Alfred, J3, P.O. Box 580, Kissimmee, Florida 32741.

HUNDREDS WEEKLY/Become Circular Mailer. Home-Operated! Sincerely Interested, Rush stamped envelope: NATIONAL MAILING, Box 19759-EN8, San Diego, CA 92119.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations...Closeouts...Job Lots...Single Samples. Free Details: Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 730-IO, Holland, MI 49423.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

UNIVERSITY DEGREES! Economical home study for Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate. Prestigious faculty counsels for independent study and life experience credits. Free information—Richard Crews, M.D. (Harvard), President, Columbia Pacific University, 1415 Third St., Dept. 2M19, San Rafael, CA 94901; Toll Free: 800/227-1617, Ext. 480; California: 800/772-3545, Ext. 480.

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, New Bern, N.C. 28560.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

A gift sure to please—ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send $19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305.

GOVERNMENT SURPLUS

"GOVERNMENT SURPLUS" JEEPS $30.00! 5,000,000 Items! Complete Information Your Area. 1986 OFFICIAL DIRECTORY. $3.00 (Guaranteed). SURPLUS, (B94), 4620 Wisconsin Northwest, WASHINGTON, DC 20016.

HYPNOTISM

FREE Catalog. Hypnotism, Hypnotic cassettes, sleep learning. Become the person you truly want to be. DLMH, Box 487, Anaheim, CA 92805.

LOANS BY MAIL

BORROW $25,000 "OVERNIGHT". Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report! Success Research, Box 19739-SW, Indianapolis, IN 46219.

VISA® Obtained Easily! Been Turned Down? Bankrupt? No Credit? No Problem! Write Immediately for Details! Credit-DP986, Box 2289, Sandusky, Ohio 44870.

LOANS BY MAIL—Cont'd

SIGNATURE Cash Loans! Application Rushed! Plus the Most Exciting Financial Techniques to get you Cash! MBG-DP986, Box 2298, Sandusky, Ohio 44870.

MAILING LISTS

COMPUTERIZED—opportunity seekers. Adhesive labels. Guaranteed! Deliverable! 500/$25; 1000/$40; 5000/$175. Dealer's Co-Operative, 4158-I Calhoun, Gary, IN 46408. (219) 838-7099. Visa/Mastercard.

MEMORY IMPROVEMENT

INSTANT MEMORY...NEW WAY TO REMEMBER. No memorization. Release your PHOTOGRAPHIC memory. Stop forgetting! FREE information. Institute of Advanced Thinking, 845DP ViaLapaz, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272.

MISCELLANEOUS

OLD-TIME RADIO—The best shows on reels or cassettes. Best quality, fastest service. Catalog $1.00: P.O. Box 3509, Lakeland, FL 33802.

THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THE ZIP CODE: please use it when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

$60.00 per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

"1,000'S WEEKLY"! $ECURING/$TUFFING ENVELOPES! $TART IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: ASSOCIATES, #210-DPG, MAPLE GLEN, PA 19002.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

EASY Business, earn $1,000's Weekly! Free details! Send Stamped Addressed Envelope: Todco, Dept. 3, 4219 W. Olive Ave., Burbank, CA 91505.

TAXES GETTING YOU DOWN? Send $2.00 (Postage) for Report to: VENTURES, Box 967, Suffolk, VA 23434.

TURN Ideas into Fortunes! Learn How. Free Details. Panscript Publications, Dept. I, 717 Utah Circle, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

CAN YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for $500.00 weekly? Send six 22¢ stamps. Blume, Box 460159, Garland, TX 75046.

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE! Earn $1,000's weekly mailing circulars! Sensational Income Opportunity! Free details: Mailer, 323 Franklin, Suite M-369, Chicago, IL 60606.

NEED EXTRA CASH. Rush $1.00 for information to: Hansen's Gifts, 2901 Pheasant Drive, Casper, Wyoming 82604.

FREE yourself from mortgage payments forever! New report tells all. Send $3.00 to: Segal International, P.O. Box 47344, Oak Park, Michigan 48237.

MAKE MONEY IN SPARE TIME. Earn generous commissions as a subscription representative for all leading magazines. Work from your own home, serving your friends and neighbors. For free details, send this ad with your name and address to: International Circulation Distributors. The Hearst Corporation. Dept. AB-I, 250 W. 55th St., New York, N.Y. 10019.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

$1000 WEEKLY POSSIBLE! Mailing Envelopes! Easy Guaranteed Income! Free Details: SEVENSTAR, Box 187-D, Niagara Falls, NY 14305.

OF INTEREST TO ALL

LOCATE MISSING PERSONS, for fun, profit or adventure. Full or part-time, $1,000's possible. YOU CAN FIND ANYONE, 407 W. Santa Clara, Santa Ana, CA 92706.

PERSONAL

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people! 18-80, Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

CHRISTIAN SINGLES OUTREACH. Local/Worldwide—Phone/Mail Introductions. Free Information/Fast Service. Write: Box 9020-TM, Van Nuys, CA 91409.

SINGLES, US/WORLDWIDE, seek enlightened correspondence, sincere friendships. SCANNA INTERNATIONAL-CO3, Box 4, Pittsford, NY 14534.

B. E. Steele, Trans Medium will answer three questions for $10.00. Send M.O. to: 6417 Amanda Lane, Ravenna, Ohio 44266.

MEET New Friends for Fun and Dating. Women join Free. Call Lisa Anytime. 1-800-253-3462 (California 1-800-338-3331).

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PERSONAL—Cont'd

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS, worldwide, want correspondence, friendship, marriage. Details, photos free! Rothe, Box 270/D, Berlin 61, W. Germany.

TIMING is the key to success. Know your personal year cycles. Send address, birthday, $2.00 to: Duste, Box 868, Exeter, NH 03833.

RECIPES

10 Authentic English recipes. Send $5.00: Angela Halsell, 200 S. Dolliver Pismo Beach, California 93449.

GENUINE TEXAS TACO RECIPES! 10 Different. Bonus includes easy beef jerky recipe. $3.00. Tenney, 8634 Serene Ridge, San Antonio, Texas 78239.

RECORDS, TAPES & SOUND EQUIPMENT

ENJOY mysteries, comedies, and more! Classic radio, television broadcast catalog—$2.00. BRC Productions, Box 39552-M, Redford, MI 48239-0522.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

STAMP COLLECTING

30 WILD ANIMALS only 25¢ to introduce our Foreign Approvals. Weblor, 140A Elm, No. Reading, MA 01864.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

UNUSUAL BOOKS

THE INTELLIGENCE LIBRARY: Many unique books & official manuals on RESTRICTED subjects—Bugging, Wiretapping, Locksmithing, Covert Investigation, & MUCH MORE. Free brochures, MENTOR, DP, 135-53 No. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. 11354.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I. M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG

ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department/Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $48.00 for 15 Words or Less
$3.20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

_____ Words at $3.20 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each
Total amount for 1 ad $ _____

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ _____
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85
(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example: One 15 word ad $48.00 x 3 months = $144.00 x .85 = $122.40)

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$48.00**	(2) **$48.00**	(3) **$48.00**	(4) **$48.00**	(5) **$48.00**
(6) **$48.00**	(7) **$48.00**	(8) **$48.00**	(9) **$48.00**	(10) **$48.00**
(11) **$48.00**	(12) **$48.00**	(13) **$48.00**	(14) **$48.00**	(15) **$48.00**
(16) **$51.20**	(17) **$54.40**	(18) **$57.60**	(19) **$60.80**	(20) **$64.00**
(21) **$67.20**	(22) **$70.40**	(23) **$73.60**	(24) **$76.80**	(25) **$80.00**
(26) **$83.20**	(27) **$86.40**	(28) **$89.60**	(29) **$92.80**	(30) **$96.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word: Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017: 7 WORDS: Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each.: Garden City, New York: 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A, 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

NEXT ISSUE...

10 *NEW* stories—including

ISAAC ASIMOV (about the Black Widowers)
MARTIN RUSSELL (about walks in the park)
EDWARD D. HOCH (about Ben Snow)
THOMAS ADCOCK (about a thrown-away child)
HUGH PENTECOST (about Julian Quist)
WILLIAM BANKIER (about the prize in the pack)
CLARK HOWARD (about cattle rustling)

ELEANOR SULLIVAN ..... *Editor*
CINDY GOLDMAN ..... *Assistant Editor*
RALPH RUBINO ..... *Corporate Art Director*
GERARD HAWKINS ..... *Associate Art Director*
JEAN WEISS ..... *Associate Designer*
CARL BARTEE ..... *Director of Manufacturing*
CAROLE DIXON ..... *Production Manager*
VALERIE BARTLETT ..... *Production Assistant*
LOUISE MUGAR ..... *Circulation Director, Retail Marketing*
PRISCILLA GARSTON ..... *Circulation Director, Subscriptions*
JAMES CAULKINS ..... *Circulation Planning Director*
CYNTHIA MANSON *Subsidiary Rights Director*
FLORENCE EICHIN ..... *Permissions & Contracts Manager*
IRENE BOZOKI ..... *Classified Advertising Manager*
JAMIE FILLON ..... *Advertising Manager*

Advertising Sales Office

NEW YORK
212-557-9100

JOEL DAVIS
President & Publisher

LEONARD F. PINTO
Vice President & General Manager

FRED EDINGER
Vice President Finance

PAULA COLLINS
Vice President Circulation

WILLIAM F. BATTISTA
Associate Publisher

ELLERY QUEEN
Editor-in-Chief (1941–1982)

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Vol. 88. No. 3. Whole No. 521. September 1986. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.95 a copy. Annual subscription $19.50 in U.S.A. and possessions; $23.00 elsewhere, payable in advance and in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1930, Marion, Ohio 43305. **Call (614) 383-3141 with questions regarding your subscription.** Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third-class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario.

© 1986 Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen.

Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1930, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 628 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1. ISSN: 0013-6328.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Be the judge and jury for just $1.

Get $155.40 worth of Best Selling Mysteries for $1.

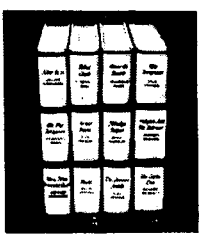
☑ **You get twelve full-length novels for $1.** ☑ **Select only the books you want.**
☑ **Save 60 to 80% off original publisher's prices.** ☑ **Pay no money in advance, ever.**

JUDGE FOR YOURSELF. Our mystery books are the best spine-tinglers anywhere. To introduce you to these gripping tales of suspense and intrigue, we're making this remarkable offer...For only $1, The Detective Book Club will send you these twelve full length novels, each a masterpiece of mystery. Bought separately, these twelve novels would cost you $155.40. For this special trial offer, all twelve are yours, in four handsome, hardcover triple-volumes as shown, for only $1 plus shipping. An incredible value.

SAVE 60-80%. As a member you are GUARANTEED a savings of 60-80% off original publisher's prices. That's a savings of at least $22 for each triple-volume you choose to own. And most importantly, you will select from only the best of the more-than-400 mysteries published yearly. Authors like Brian Garfield, Dick Francis and Hugh Pentecost. For any triple-volume you select, you pay just $9.95 plus shipping...that's only $3.32 for each easy-to-read, unabridged, full-length mystery.

There's No Mystery! There is no mystery to how our club works. Six times a year you will receive, free, the club's Previews describing upcoming selections. As a member, you may reject any volume before or after receiving it.

There is never a minimum number of books to buy, and you may return any unwanted selection within 21 days and owe nothing. And of course, you may cancel your membership at any time. As one of the oldest book clubs in America, we want you to be satisfied. Simply fill out the coupon and return it to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, NY 11576.



Please enroll me as a member and send me my four triple-volumes shown here, containing twelve mysteries. I enclose no money now. I'll examine them for one week, then will either accept all for $1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive, free, the club's monthly Preview which describes my next selections. I will always have at least 10 days to reject any volume by returning the form provided. I may return any book within 21 days and owe nothing. For each volume I keep, I'll send you $9.95 plus shipping. I may cancel my membership at any time. Satisfaction Guaranteed.

6-LK
D24M3V

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, NY 11576

PUBLISHED BY
WALTER J. BLACK, INC.
ESTABLISHED 1923

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Note: Members accepted in USA and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A NEW WRITER WHO GOES RIGHT FOR THE JUGULAR."*

BENJAMIN M. SCHUTZ

A NEW LEO HAGGERTY THRILLER

ALL THE OLD BARGAINS

TRADE HARDCOVER $13.95 ISBN: 0-312-94014-9
SEPTEMBER RELEASE

Already Published:

"A TAUT THRILLER."*

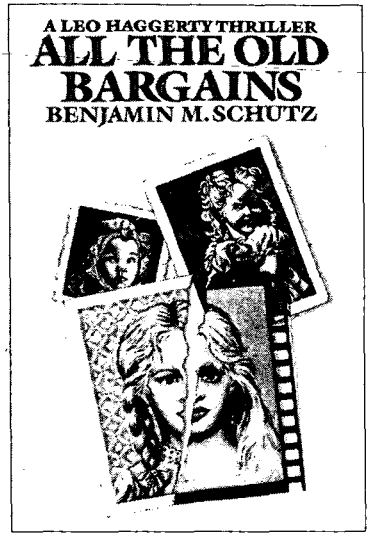
"First person narration keeps the mystery gripping. Schutz, a clinical psychologist displays in his first novel a fine understanding of the psychotic-criminal mind."
–Publishers Weekly

EMBRACE THE WOLF

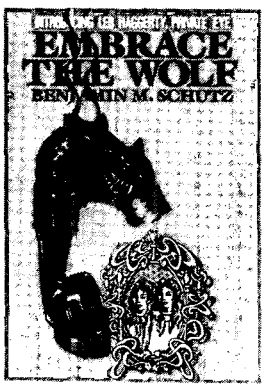
TRADE HARDCOVER $13.95 ISBN: 0-312-94137-4

■ Get a letter from Leo Haggerty, write dept. LH1

*OCALA STAR-BANNER (FLA)



Jacket art: Jill Baumann



Jacket art: Jill Baumann

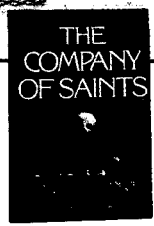
Bluejay Books Inc.
1123 Broadway, Suite 306
New York, NY 10010
Distributed by St. Martin's Press in the U.S.A. and by Methuen Publications in Canada

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

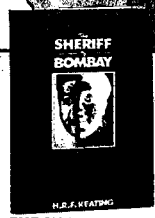
You're invited to the trial.

THE DEVIL'S NOVICE
by Ellis Peters
Mariet Aspley...aspiring monk or Satan's helper?
Pub. List $13.95

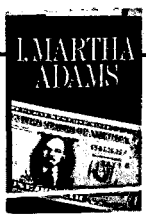
KILLED ON THE ICE
by William L. DeAndrea
A flagpole holds the key to a murder.
Pub. List $11.95



THE COMPANY OF SAINTS
by Evelyn Anthony
A secret assassination organization threatens the world.
Pub. List $15.95



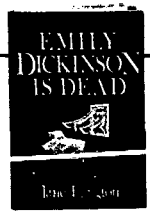
THE SHERIFF OF BOMBAY
by H.R.F. Keating
Are high officials immune from punishment?
Pub. List $11.95



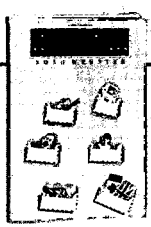
I, MARTHA ADAMS
by Pauline Glen Winslow
A suspenseful cross-country race to save America.
Pub. List $12.95

THE GARBAGE COLLECTOR
by Aaron Marc Stein
High society European romp with Matt Erridge and murder.
Pub. List $11.95

THE PRICE OF SILENCE
by Hugh Pentecost
The hunter now becomes the hunted.
Pub. List $12.95



EMILY DICKINSON IS DEAD
by Jane Langton
A centennial celebration unleashes arson, deceit and murder.
Pub. List $13.95



A LEGACY FROM TENERIFE
by Noah Webster
The Canary Islands contain a fortune worth killing for.
Pub. List $11.95

NECESSITY
by Brian Garfield
To live, Mattie LaCasse must "die."
Pub. List $13.95

A LOVELY DAY TO DIE
by Celia Fremlin
Thirteen choice mystery morsels to enjoy.
Pub. List $11.95

ROOT OF ALL EVIL
by E.X. Ferrars
Felicity Silvester's death foretold —prank or prophecy?
Pub. List $11.95

RECEIVE 12 MYSTERIES FOR JUST $1.

For details see last page.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

CENSORED COPY
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED